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INTERFERENCE.

INTERFERENCE.

A Novel.

BY

B. M. CROKER,

AUTHOR OF

"PROPER PRIDE," "PRETTY MISS NEVILLE,"

"A BIRD OF PASSAGE," "DIANA BARRINGTON,"

"TWO MASTERS," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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INTERFERENCE.

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CHAPTER I.

“ MISERRIME.”

ON the strength of his increase of income, Mr. Holroyd purchased two ponies, and a cart (and this cart, it was noted, had a ladies' step). He had long admired a certain empty bungalow with a large garden, and rose - screened verandah. More than once he had inspected the interior, and at last he boldly gave orders to the landlord to have the garden put in order, the hedges clipped, and the rooms matted. When it became noised abroad that George Holroyd had been seen looking over a large double house,

that he had ordered a dinner-service, and a piano, the truth could be no longer concealed, he was going to be married ! This was a fine piece of news for Mangobad. The men congratulated him somewhat sadly but the ladies made up for them in fervour, and were all on the *qui vive* to know what the bride would be like. Captain La Touche, being searchingly cross-questioned, was able to gratify them with a few particulars respecting her. She was young—only nineteen—Irish, and pretty, and, as far as he could make out, she would be an agreeable addition to their circle. Mr. Holroyd was not the least bashful in accepting their good wishes, and seemed anxious to bespeak their friendship for his future wife. She was so young and inexperienced, he declared—quite a child in many ways, and only hitherto accus-

tomed to a very quiet country life. He was exceedingly grateful for any suggestions offered by notable housekeepers and a great deal of advice was placed ungrudgingly at his service. The Judge's wife engaged a cook, khansamah, and ayah ; the Chaplain's sister superintended the purchase of lamps and kitchen utensils, the Colonel's two daughters chose furniture for the drawing-room, and went over the rooms and discussed arrangements and ornamentation with zeal.

All at once the community were electrified to hear that Mr. Holroyd had suddenly changed his mind about what was called the “ garden ” bungalow, and was going into the two-storeyed one, which had so long stood empty—the bungalow in which the last tenant, Major Bagshawe, had cut his throat. What was the reason of such an extraordinary

freak ? Why exchange a modern, well-built house, with a cheerful aspect, for a gloomy tumble-down mansion—certainly more imposing, and standing in quite a park-like enclosure, but which had been abandoned to rats and ghosts for years. No one knew the motive for this strange proceeding—not even Captain La Touche.

A few days before “this mysterious caprice of George Holroyd’s,” the long desired mail had been received—the mail which was to bring him Betty’s answer in her own handwriting, instead of that of the telegraph Baboo. The night before it was delivered in Mangobad, he could scarcely close his eyes. He was astir by daybreak, and watching for the post peon long before that worthy began his rounds. Here he came in sight at last, and with a good plump packet of letters

in his hand. George almost tore them from him, and then hurried into his room to read them in solitude, where no bearer with tea, or sweeper with broom, dared disturb him. There was one from his mother, one from his lawyer, one from Mrs. Redmond, one from Belle, but where was Betty's? He turned them over very carefully, and then ran out after the dakwalla. “Hullo! Stop! Hold on!” he shouted (in Hindustani of course), “you have another letter for me.”

The man halted and showed his wallet; there was nothing else addressed to Mr. Holroyd, no, not even a trade circular. “There must be some mistake,” he muttered to himself, as he slowly retraced his steps. Could she have missed the mail? He must only content himself with Mrs. Redmond's epistle for the present, and, happy thought, that thrifty

old lady's effusion might contain Betty's letter after all ! Alas, no, there was only one sheet of paper within the envelope, and this is what it said :

“ DEAR MR. HOLROYD,—Your letter and enclosure reached me by the last mail, and I am rather concerned as to how to reply to it, for I have taken a step that will surprise you and which you may never forgive—I have given your offer of marriage to my daughter Belle.”

A rush of blood came suddenly to George Holroyd's ears, the paper seemed to swim before him ; he threw it down on the table, and placing both hands to his head, exclaimed aloud :

“ I must be going mad ! Either that, or she is writing from a lunatic asylum ! ”

After a moment's pause, he once more snatched up the letter, and read on :

“There was nothing in your note that did not equally apply to her, and Belle is so fond of you, and you paid her such marked attention, that if you were to marry Betty she would lose her reason—or break her heart.

“India has always been her dream, and, with you and India combined, her happiness is assured, and I may tell you frankly, that this is all that I now care for. You will think me a very wicked, unprincipled old woman, but I have your interests at heart, as well as Belle’s, and, though I shall not live to know it, you will approve of my conduct *yet*. I am dying by inches. I may not see another summer, and I obey the most natural of all instincts in providing (when I can) for my own child. Even if you execrate me, I can endure your hatred, for I shall be supported by the conviction, that I have done well.

“ Belle, beautiful, animated, and accustomed to the best military society, is the beau ideal of an officer’s wife, and will be in a congenial sphere—your credit and your comfort. Betty—a simple, little, awkward girl, with no ideas beyond horses and dogs and flowers—is cut out for the position *she* is about to fill ; as the wife of a wealthy country gentleman, she can make herself happy in her own land, she is in her element among poor people, or in the hunting-field, and would be quite miserable in India. She is going to marry Augustus Moore ; they are devotedly attached to one another, and he has known her from her childhood.”

“ *Mentitor fortiter,*” was Mrs. Redmond’s motto, and to do her justice, she lived up to it ; in a crisis like the present *what* was a lie more or less ? This

notable falsehood gave a neat and suitable finish to the whole scheme. Moreover, like all lies of the most dangerous class, it contained a grain of the truth—Augustus Moore had known Betty from childhood, and a less keen-sighted woman than the mistress of Noone, could see that he was her slave; the match was merely a question of time.

“ In withholding your offer from Betty,” the letter went on to say, “ I am sparing you the mortification of a refusal. I have put the round people in the round holes in spite of you, you see, and by the time you are reading this, Belle (who knows nothing, poor darling) will be half way to India with the Calverts. Betty has been helping her most zealously in her preparations, and keeping up all our spirits with her merry ways, and gay little jokes and songs.

“I do not know what we should have done without her ; she has not the faintest suspicion that you care for her, for all her thoughts are fixed in *another* direction. Be good to Belle—she is quite a child, a spoiled child in many ways ; she is not much of a manager or house-keeper, for I have wished her to make the most of her youth, and only asked her to be happy and to look pretty. She is devoted to you, and has been so from the very first, though with true maidenly dignity she has concealed her feelings—even from *me*, but I know that the prospect of being your wife, has filled her with unspeakable happiness. Perhaps, after all, you may repudiate her love, you may refuse to receive her, and leave her a friendless, nervous, sensitive girl, unwelcomed in a strange land—only to return home broken-hearted, dis-illusioned,

and disgraced ; but I scarcely believe you will be capable of this, knowing that she loves you, confides in you, and has no friends in India. Do not answer this letter. I may as well tell you, candidly, that if you do I shall not read it, but will put it into the fire, for in my failing health, my medical man advises me strictly against any kind of unnecessary agitation. Pray, believe me yours most faithfully,

“ EMMA REDMOND.”

By the time George Holroyd had come to the end of this precious epistle, it would be impossible to describe his feelings ; they were a mixture of incredulity, horror, agonising disappointment, and uncontrollable fury.

“ Mrs. Redmond was mad ! ” this he swore with a great oath ; “ or he was mad, and everyone was mad.”

He seized his mother's letter, much as a drowning man clutches at a straw ; it proved to be a somewhat querulous effusion, wondering that he had never given *her* a hint of his intentions, amazed to hear of his engagement to Belle, and pathetically imploring him to "think it over," but wishing him every happiness—whatever his fate. Delighted at the news of his uncle's generosity, and hinting (nay, more than hinting) that he might share some of his good fortune with Denis—openly stating that his poor dear brother wrote the most pitiful accounts of his circumstances, and that she was sure he would be annoyed to hear that he had actually applied to Mrs. Maccabe for pecuniary assistance, instead of to his *own* flesh and blood, and that a line to Denis Malone, care of the barman at the Kangaroo Arms,

Albany, South Australia, would always find him.

George put this epistle aside, and tore open Belle’s envelope with a shaking hand.

When his eyes fell on the page beginning “ My own, own darling,” he crumbled the letter up into a ball, and dashed it from him with anything but a lover-like gesture.

Then he rose and began to walk about the room like a man possessed. He might have guessed how it would be ! Betty was not bound to him in any way, and whilst he had been toiling for her in silence, at the other side of the world—Ghosty Moore was within speech—within a ride !

Ghosty Moore was rich, young, and popular. He could give her everything her heart desired. She would marry him, and be beloved, admired and happy. A

county lady with half a dozen hunters, and as many dogs as she pleased. As for him, his life was wrecked, it did not matter what became of him ; he threw himself into a chair, leant his arms on the table, buried his head in them, and wished himself dead.

That Betty was lost to him was beyond doubt, and that Belle was on her way out to marry him, was also beyond doubt ; but no, he said to himself fiercely, he would never make her his wife, and thus fulfil the schemes, and be the easy tool, of her iniquitous old mother ; never !

To have the dearest hopes of his life dispersed by one shattering blow was surely sufficiently hard for a man to bear, but to have another fate imperatively thrust on him within the same hour—a fate from which his highest and best feelings instinctively recoiled—a fate

that his heart most passionately repudiated—this was to drink the cup of bitterness to the dregs, twice !

And if he refused to accept Belle as his bride, what was his alternative ? he asked himself, with fierce perplexity.

He felt dazed and stunned ; the more he endeavoured to muster his thoughts, to pursue ideas, to reach some definite plan, the more unmanageable those thoughts and ideas became.

It was desperately hard to realise that one short ten minutes had changed the whole current of his life.

* * * * *

Even to one's old familiar friend, I doubt if it is wise to give the entrée to your private room at all hours. He may chance to find a soul in earthly torment, a mind *en deshabille*, with the mask of

conventionality, and the cloak of reserve, torn off, and thrown to the winds.

Captain La Touche was whistling cheerily as he crossed the verandah, and entered his comrade's apartment. He looked cool, handsome, and debonnair in his creaseless white suit and spotless linen (he was such a dandy that he actually sent his shirts twice a month to England to be washed ; and oh ! feat beyond the dhoby ! *glazed*). He had evidently had a good mail, for his face was radiant, and he carried a packet of letters, and a French comic paper in his hand. All at once his whistling ceased, as his eyes fell on his comrade's prone head---and the torn and discarded letters scattered broadcast about the floor.

“Hullo, George, my dear old chap !” he exclaimed, “you have not any bad news I hope. No one dead, eh ?”

George raised a rigid white face to his, and gazed at him blankly and shook his head.

“ Your money gone again, eh ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ Oh, come then, it can't be so very bad, pull yourself together, my son, and have a whisky and soda ; you look as if you had been knocked into the middle of next week. What is it all about ? ”

“ I've—I've a splitting headache.”

“ Oh, and is *that* all ? ” rather dubiously.

“ And some rather worrying letters,” he continued, making a great effort to carry out the second part of his visitor's prescription. “ I shall be all right by and by, don't mind me.”

At first a wild idea had flashed through his brain. He would consult his friend, and put the whole story before him, like a hard case in *Vanity*

Fair, and say, "supposing a man proposes for one girl, and another comes out instead, believing that *she* is the right one—what would you do? Marry her?" But as he gazed at Captain La Touche, that sleek, prosperous, cynical bachelor, Lord President of the Mess (sometimes a heritage of woe) and bitter enemy of matrimony, his heart failed him. "Joe," as he was called, would explode into one of his loud bursts of laughter, and declare that it was the best joke he had ever heard in the whole course of his life! Instead of being sober-minded and sympathetic, he would chaffingly examine the capabilities of the subjects for burlesque treatment; he would be jocose and unbearable. But in this belief George did his friend injustice!

In one vivid mental flash, he saw the ordeal he would now have to face at

mess, an ordeal he dared not confront. The good-humoured jokes, congratulations, and presents of his brother officers, were acceptable enough yesterday, but *to-day* they would be torture, as it were, searing a gaping wound with red-hot iron. How was he to assume a part—he being no actor at the best of times—the part of the happy and expectant bridegroom ! His thoughts flew to a certain lonely dāk bungalow, about twenty miles out, rarely frequented, and sufficiently far from the haunts of men. He would go in at once for ten days’ leave for snipe shooting, put a few things together, and gallop out there as soon as orderly-room was over. He must be alone, like some wounded animal, that plunges into the thicket, when it has received a mortal hurt—that it may die apart from its fellows, and endure its agony unseen.

Once there, he would have time to advise with himself, to review the whole burning question, and to meditate on falsified hopes, abandoned aims, and a lost love.

The maturing of this sudden project did not occupy sixty seconds, and Captain La Touche was still standing interrogatively in the doorway.

“I’m not feeling very fit, Joe, the cramming *is* beginning to tell as you predicted. I think I shall go out for ten days’ snipe shooting, to blow the cobwebs out of my brains.”

“It’s too early for snipe,” objected his visitor, “make it the end of next week, and *I’ll* go with you, old man !”

“I saw several wisps coming in last evening and——”

“And of course I *forgot*,” interrupted the other jocosely, “your time is short,

poor fellow, and who knows if it may not be your *last* shoot. Such things have happened ! Where are you going ? "

" I was thinking of Sungoo," he returned rather nervously.

" Sungoo ! A nasty feverish hole ! I would not go there if I were you."

" There are several first class jheels about, and I'd like to make a good bag," returned the other, now lying as freely as Mrs. Redmond herself.

" Well, well, have your own way, you always do," returned his chum with a French shrug of his broad shoulders. "'Pon my word, you gave me a jolly good fright, just now, I thought there was bad news, something up at home. By-bye," and he opened his big white umbrella, and strode off to breakfast.

Sungoo dâk bungalow was retired enough for St. Anthony himself ; it stood

aloof from the high road, behind a clump of bamboos, and a hedge of somewhat dusty cactus.

George Holroyd's active bearer made daily raids on the nearest village for fowl and eggs and goat's milk, whilst his master paced the verandah, or tramped over the country, and fought with his thoughts, and endeavoured to shape out his future life. Willingly would he change his lot for that of one of the cheerful brown tillers of the soil, by whom he was surrounded, and whom he came across in his long and aimless wanderings. How absorbed and interested was that young fellow, as he sat at the edge of a tank, dividing his time between his bamboo rod, and bobbing line, and the inevitable *huka* that stood beside him.

He did not seem to have a care in the

world !—and it was never likely to be *his* fate to marry a woman against his will ! All the same, did his envious observer but know the truth, it was more than probable that the same young man had been married from his cradle.

Sungoo dâk bungalow was not only famed for seclusion and sport—it was notoriously unhealthy ; the rank vegetation and the vapours from the neighbouring reedy snipe jheels made it an undesirable residence. Hideous spiders with wormy legs, and semi-tame toads abounded in the three small rooms. Mushrooms grew out of the walls, a family of noisy civet cats lodged in the roof, hundreds of frogs held oratorios in a neighbouring pond, rendering sleep impossible—and altogether it was as damp and dreary a dwelling as anyone could wish to see ; and a man who had taken a dislike to existence

could not have chosen a more congenial abode.

One day George's bearer went considerably further than the nearest mud-walled village; he galloped post haste into Mangobad, and informed Captain La Touche and his brother officers that his master was very ill, in a raging fever, and "talking very strangely."

"That's it," vociferated his chum, "I was afraid there was something up. You notice he never sent in a *single* brace of snipe, and he knows what a boon they are."

He and the station doctor set off at once, and brought the patient in the next morning in a dhooly. He was still in a high fever, but perfectly conscious and alive to his surroundings.

For days he had been racked with an uncontrollable longing to see Betty only

once, and to speak to her face to face—as vain a longing as that of the wretched captive in a deep, dark dungeon, who languishes to see the sun !

As Captain La Touche sat by him, and gazed at him anxiously, he opened his eyes, and said in a low voice : “ Joe, I would give half my life to see her but for five minutes—and to speak to her face to face.”

Captain La Touche was exceedingly concerned, and subsequently told his brother officers that it looked like a bad business, for Holroyd was still delirious and wandering in his mind.

Ten days’ excellent nursing brought him round, and the doctor was most assiduous in what he called “ patching him up ” in order that he might be in time to meet the steamer. Nevertheless all George’s friends were shocked at the change that

such a short illness had made in his appearance. He looked as if he had aged ten years in ten days ; his eyes were sunken, his cheeks hollow, and he was so weak and emaciated that, according to one of his comrades, "he appeared to be walking about, to save the expenses of his funeral," and in this cheerful condition he went down to Bombay, to accept the inevitable, and to receive his bride.

CHAPTER II.

“THE HONEYMOON.”

“Face joys a costly mask to wear,
’Tis bought with pangs long nourishèd
And rounded to despair.”

“ON the 5th instant, at the Cathedral, Bombay, by the Rev. Erasmus Jones, George Holroyd, Lieutenant, Her Majesty’s Royal Musketeers, only son of the late George Holroyd, and grandson of Sir Mowbray Holroyd, of Rivals Place, county Durham, to Isabelle Felicité, daughter of the late Fergus Redmond, grand-niece of Lord Bogberry, and great-grand-niece of the Marquis of Round Tower. By Telegram.”

Mrs. Redmond herself had composed this high-sounding announcement, and had

handed it to Colonel Calvert, with instructions to insert the date, and not to trust it to Holroyd, but to see to it himself—perhaps in her secret heart she feared that George might modify her magnificent composition.

The wedding was strictly private, and if the bridegroom looked haggard and pre-occupied, the bride was both blooming and beaming. The Calverts and Miss Gay were the only guests, and after the ceremony, the happy pair went direct to the railway station, and departed on a tour up country. They visited Jeypore, Ajmir, Delhi, Agra, and Lucknow. Belle liked the bustle, the constant change, the novelty of her surroundings, the admiring eyes of other passengers, and the luxury of having every wish most carefully studied. But she did not much appreciate Indian sights and Indian

scenery. She gave them but a very cursory notice, her attention being chiefly centred on her fellow travellers. It was the flood-tide of the globe-trotting season—English, Americans, French, and Australians, were scattered over the land in hundreds, “doing India,” from a certain point of view, and believing that when they had seen the Taj at Agra, the burning ghaut at Benares, the snows at Darjeeling, a snake charmer, and a fakeer, they were henceforth qualified authorities on the Eastern question! The hotels were crammed, the proprietors reaping a golden harvest, and often at their wits’ end to find quarters for their guests. Belle enjoyed the numerous and varied society she met at the table d’hôte, her roving, challenging dark eyes daily wandered among what were, to her, entirely new types. There was the purse-proud, tubby

little man, who scorned the letter H and expected to be served as promptly and as obsequiously as if he were in his own house ; who roared and stormed in English at amazed Mahomedan khitmatgars, who did not understand either him or his wants. There were the people who entered into conversation right and left, and cheerfully discussed plans and places, the people who never opened their mouths but to receive their forks—or knives ; the people who ate everything, the people who barely tasted a morsel—and the delicate couple from Calcutta who had brought their own cook ! The American party, mostly wearing pince-nez, bright, brisk, agreeable, seeing the world at rail-road speed and pleased with all they saw, sleeping in trains, eating in “ticca” gharries, *en route* to some sight, and writing up their diaries at every spare moment. The English

family—comprised of a father collecting facts, a mother collecting pottery, two pretty daughters, a valet and a maid—to whom time and money were no object, and who were a perfect fortune to the hawkers who haunted the hotel verandahs. There was the gentleman from New Zealand, who was surprised at nothing but the gigantic size of the cockroaches, and the ruddy-cheeked youth from Belfast, who was surprised at everything, and who half expected to see tigers sporting on the Apollo Bunder or chasing the Bombay trams ; also the two cautious ladies, who brought their hand-bags to the table, and read guide books between the courses. Moreover, there was the handsome rich young man who had come out to shoot big game, and discoursed eloquently of the delights of the Terai, and the merits of explosive bullets, and shikar elephants,

and was not unlikely to be “brought down” himself by the bright eyes of an Australian girl, who played off Japan against the jungles. Last, but not least, the seasoned Anglo-Indian, passing through to his district or his regiment up country, who spoke the language glibly, helped his fellow creatures to make their wants understood, and seemed absolutely at home with his trusty bearer, his bedding, and his tiffin basket—and being well known to the hotel baboo, and so to speak on his adopted heath, secured, without a second’s demur, the best room, and the best attention. Many of these travellers were encountered by the Holroyds over and over again, and Belle, in her lively way, had devised nicknames for most of them ; nor did they themselves pass unnoticed. No one suspected them of being newly married, for Belle, though smartly

dressed and remarkably handsome, was no young girl ; nor were she and her husband selfishly absorbed in one another, to the exclusion of ordinary mortals. They were known among their companies as “the lady with the poodle,” and “the man with the headache,” for George looked as if he were a continual martyr to that distressing affliction. He was unmistakably an officer—the lively girl who had been in Japan declared she guessed it by his boots—and the couple were supposed to be residents taking a little cold weather tour, *à la* Darby and Joan. This mistake was intolerable to Belle, and she pursued one harmless lady with undying animosity, because as they were shuffling out to Amba, on the same elephant, she had innocently remarked :

“I suppose this sort of a ride is no

novelty to you—you are quite accustomed to India.”

Belle, whose temper was precarious, and who was now in a deadly fright, and consequently inclined to be cross, said snappishly :

“ Pray *how* long do you suppose I have been married ? ”

“ Well, say ten years——”

“ Say ten days,” rejoined the bride, with laconic severity.

“ Oh my ! I *am* vexed. Well, I hope you’ll excuse me ;” but Belle did not do anything so generous, and cut her dead when they subsequently met at Laurie’s Hotel, Agra. The moon was full and, as a natural consequence, so was the hotel ; for what sight so renowned as the Taj by moonlight ? Belle went over the fort, grumbling and reluctant, in the wake of a conscientious guide ; the day was

warm and there was far too much to see ! The Motee Musjid, the Jasmin Tower, the dining halls, durbar halls, tilting yards court yards, and baths—the combined works of Akbar and Shahjehan. Her taste was more for the horrible than the beautiful, and when she was taken from marble halls above, to dark dungeons and underground passages below, and when she had crawled, torch in hand, through a hole in the wall, and seen with her own eyes the secret chamber where women of the palace were strangled and thrown into the Jumna, she expressed herself as deeply interested and gratified. The tomb across the river was duly visited, and then the Taj. Yes. She admired it ! but it aroused her enthusiasm in a much fainter degree than the contents of a shop of gold and silver embroidery, although the sight that bursts on the traveller as he

enters the great gateway, and catches the first glimpse of the approach, surmounted by the famous dome and minarets, is surely unsurpassed. The Taj, to translate its name, is "the crown" of every building in the world, and it is to be regretted that Shahjehan did not live to carry out his intention of building a similar tomb for himself in black marble at the other side of the river, connecting the two by a marble bridge.

Belle agreed to a second visit by moonlight, because, as she assured herself, "it was a thing to say she had seen," but the admiration the Tomb evoked, the intent look on men's faces, the tears in the women's eyes, merely filled her with amazement and derision. She praised the delicate Italian inlaid work, and the lace-like marble screens, and tried her not particularly sweet voice, under the echoing dome,

with a shrill roulade that considerably startled her unprepared audience. At eleven o'clock at night she again found herself in the Taj gardens; "much too early," she grumbled, as she seated herself on a bench half-way between the Taj and the entrance. "The other people won't be here for an hour." It was evidently "other people" she had come to see. George made no remark; he stood behind her with his arms folded. He had always secretly worshipped the beautiful in nature and art—an Indian sunset in the rains, a chain of lofty snow-clad peaks at sunrise, a fair landscape bathed in moonlight, appealed at once to his taste, and the building before him, with its pearl-white dome rising into the dark blue starry sky, the stately grace of this crown of love, the beauty of this perfect monument to a woman's memory, crept

into his senses and sank into his soul. The moon was so bright, the air so clear, that he could distinguish the fretwork, and the heavy-headed lilies around the basement of the tomb, and this garden, in which "the light of the Harem" had lain for eighteen years—whilst thousands of workmen laboured, aye, and died for her fame—was truly a fitting setting for so pure a gem of art, with its tall trees and paved walks, its fountains and fish ponds, its masses of yellow roses and groves of fragrant orange blossoms, now filling the air with their perfume. What a paradise for lovers, thought George, an ideal spot for whispered vows this exquisite Eastern night! But what had *he* to do with love? He was a married man, and in his heart, there was not one spark of love for the smart little lady, with the dog on her knee, who was his own, his wife, his other self

for evermore, who had a right to be beside him, and to share his lot, as long as they both should live. Esteem he might give her, respect and a certain kind of admiration, and possibly affection ; but love—Never ! Meanwhile it was his most urgent duty to disguise the truth, and sharp as Belle was, she never once guessed it. Who could be more attentive than George ? Her merest hint was caught at, the best carriages and best rooms were secured for her everywhere in advance by telegram ; he protected her from rain or heat, from draught or dust, as if she were made of wax. And he had given her most lovely presents. Such a diamond ring and such a pair of earrings ! If poor Maria Finny could only see them she would die—die of envy, hatred and malice. His affection was not demonstrative but practical—

and, as such, was appreciated and preferred.

As George's sombre eyes fell upon his companion, he noticed that she was now gazing at the Taj in an entirely different attitude, with an air of rapt, absorbed meditation. Ah, it had grown on her at last, as it did on every one ; she had even dislodged "Mossoo," who was hunting frogs, with all the zeal of his nation.

"Well, Belle, a penny for your thoughts?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh," rousing herself to look at him. "Well, I was wondering, if I could get any curling pins here? and do you know, that I have been thinking seriously about that blue and silver dress front ; perhaps I ought to take the pink one after all—you remember the one at the corner shop ; there was more stuff for the body. What do you say, dear?"

Here was a companion with whom to gaze on earth's loveliness ! No, no, Belle had, as she boasted, no sentiment about her ; she did not care for past greatness, —the marble glories of Shahjehan, nor the red granite courts of Akbar. She much preferred the present age, a brisk drive back to the hotel, and a nice little hot supper ; yes, she would rather have mulled claret and cutlets, than moonlight and marble !

"Have *both* if you like," returned George after a momentary silence, "and had we not better be making a start ?"

"Both !" rising to her feet. "Oh, you dear, good, generous George," taking his arm as she spoke "If you are quite sure that I am not too extravagant, for there is something else I want."

"What is that ?"

"A present for Betty ; you know how

good she has been to me ; she really worked like a slave to get me ready, and I would like to send her something pretty ; it need not cost much, but she has no nice things, no generous George to give her presents," glancing up coquettishly into his face. How white he looked—or was it the moon ? " You know what a dull life she leads—any little pleasure, any little surprise——"

" She won't be dull when she is Mrs. Moore," he interrupted sharply.

" I shall tell you a great secret, that no one knows but me ; she will never marry Ghosty, never. She was quite angry with me, when I teased her. She declares she will never marry any one, and if she keeps her word, as I hope she will—for who is there to marry at Ballingoole ?—it will make my mind so easy about poor mamma ! "

As Belle made this sweet, unselfish remark, they had reached the entrance, and whilst she was coaxing "Mossoo" into the carriage, George turned away, ostensibly to take one last look at the Taj as it appeared framed by the great gateway, but it was not of the Taj that he was thinking. Although his eyes were resting on a vision of a dazzling white dome and minarets, he was a prey to tormenting speculation; he was asking himself a startling question. Could Mrs. Redmond have lied to him? Or was Betty's speech merely a girl's hypocritical repudiation of a lover. Who was the most likely to speak the truth, Mrs. Redmond or Betty?

As Belle and her husband drove rapidly back towards the cantonments, with "Mossoo" extended on the front seat of the landau, they were unusually silent; not one word was spoken about

their recent expedition — they seemed buried in their own thoughts.

She was busily engaged in mentally making up the pink and silver satin, and *he* was thinking, that if what Belle had just told him was true—as true as she appeared to believe—he never would have married her !

Two days later, Mrs. Holroyd was sitting in the hotel verandah, surrounded by jewellers, their wares displayed temptingly in the invariable manner on Turkey red.

“ Well ! what about that present ? ” enquired her husband, as he discovered her. “ Get something good. Will two hundred rupees do ? ”

“ Two hundred ! I was thinking of fifty. What a lavish, extravagant fellow you are ; you will ruin yourself if I don’t look after you.”

But she accepted the sum, in spite of her pretty protestations.—George was beginning to know what these protestations were worth!—Belle carefully selected a delicate gold bangle, and exhibited it on her own wrist, with much complacency.

"You are not going to give her *that*, are you?" he enquired with secret dismay.

"Yes, I thought of it at first; it would almost match one you sent her, but really it is too much to give her, and on second thoughts," with a playful air, "don't you think it looks very well on *me*?"

"Yes, yes, of course it does; leave it where it is," he said with eager acquiescence, "you must keep it yourself."

Anything was better than sending Betty a second bangle, and Belle, the munificent, the grateful, the honourable, chose for her cousin—when her husband

was not present—a simple brooch, value thirty rupees, though she told him it cost eighty—and pocketed the balance.

From Agra, the Holroyds went to Cawnpore—melancholy Cawnpore !—with its dusty, glaring roads, grim barracks and tragic history. The garrulous guide who drove them round, lolled at his ease half into the carriage, preferring the *rôle* of *raconteur* to coachman, leaving the horses chiefly to themselves; but no doubt, they knew the too familiar weary rounds, from Nana Sahib's ruinous house, to the entrenchments—the Memorial Church—the massacre ghaut—and the well. The full details of the tragedy had a horrible fascination for Belle, and despite her husband's continual interruptions and denials, she would hear all; and the guide, for once, had a listener entirely after his own heart; but the

Indian mid-day sun, and Indian atrocities were too much for this excitable traveller with a lurid imagination. A climax arrived, when she stood gazing at the angel over the well, that exquisite embodiment of sorrow and peace—which the guide glibly assured her was "the work of 'Mackitty,' the same man who had built the Taj, at Agra." As she gazed with twitching lips, and working eyebrows, she said, "You call it a lovely face, George! Not at all. To me, it is not a face of sorrow, but a face of cold, undying vengeance. Yes, vengeance," she added, raising her voice to a scream and glaring at the guide with a wild flicker in her eyes, "why don't you keep a supply of natives here for us who come on pilgrimage? I know what *I* would do to them, with my own hands."

She looked so odd and excited, that

the old soldier was completely cowed, and ceased to relate how "he and Havelock" had marched to the relief of Cawnpore. This handsome lady had a strange face, she was muttering to herself, and gnawing her handkerchief, as she lay back on the carriage cushions, and she had passionately tossed his humble offering—a bit of yew from the site of the house of massacre—far away into the powdery white road. He had not even the presence of mind to ask for a whiskey peg, when George paid him off at the station, but he whispered confidentially as he pocketed his rupees :

"I've seen 'em in hysterics, and I've seen 'em crying, but I never saw one take on like *her* before," indicating Belle with his horny thumb. "She *would* draw me on, you see—and all them times is real to me—I was in 'em, and my words

has worked on her feelings, them and the sun has done it ; keep her cool and quiet, and she may come all right in time for the mail train."

But was it the sun ? A terrible thought, a sickening dread, occurred to George ; was there not a gleam of insanity in those fiery red eyes that encountered his, in the dim light of the waiting-room ? He and her ayah applied ice and eau-de-cologne to her head, and kept her in a still, dark room in complete quiet, and this regimen wrought a speedy cure. By the following morning Belle declared herself ready to go on at once, to go anywhere, and they proceeded to Lucknow. The grey shell-shattered walls of the Residency, the scene of her countrymen and women's heroic resistance, had no more interest for Mrs. Holroyd than the Taj. The Silver Bazaar and the

cavalry band at the "Chutter Munzil," were far more to her taste, not to speak of a screaming farce at the Mahomed Bagh Theatre. At length they turned their faces towards Mangobad, and as the train steamed out of Lucknow Station, George, as he carefully arranged Belle's pillows and rugs, and books and fans, breathed a deep sigh of thankfulness and relief—*At any rate the honeymoon was over.*

CHAPTER III.

A NEW LIFE.

THE Holroyds arrived at Mangobad, with unexpected punctuality, and Belle was in raptures with her new home—her *own* house—a spacious, well-situated bungalow, replete with every comfort. There was a German piano, a pony and cart, a cheval glass, a sewing machine, new jail carpets and matting, pretty curtains and furniture, and ornaments, a verandah filled with plants, and birds; and a tribe of respectable black-whiskered servants, with unimpeachable “chits” awaiting her good pleasure.

Truly nothing had been forgotten; this bungalow had undoubtedly been fitted up by a lover.

Belle danced about, and clapped her hands, gesticulated, and ran from room to room like a child of six. Little did she guess that all these delightful, thoughtful preparations—had been made for another person.

For several days after her arrival, she was excessively busy, unpacking and shaking out her dresses and beautifying the drawing-room, with rapid and tasteful fingers. A palm in this corner, a screen in that, a graceful drapery here, a bow of ribbon there, photographs, fans and cushions abounded—in a short time the room was transformed as if by magic, but its mistress's zeal was evanescent. Once a thing was done there was an end of it; the palms might wither, the draperies gather dust, for all she noted. She detested sustained effort. However, everything was in its pristine freshness,

when her visitors began to make their appearance.

Captain La Touche was naturally the first to call upon his friend's bride. He drove up in his dog-cart, dressed in his most recent Europe suit, and brimming over with curiosity and *bonhomie*.

Mem Sahib gave "salaam" and he was shown into the drawing-room, and there waited for a considerable time, whilst he heard sounds of someone skirmishing with drawers and wardrobe doors, in the next apartment.

He was full of pleasant anticipations of a girl of nineteen, tall and slim, with beautiful, Irish grey eyes, even in her cheap, blurred photograph she had a sweet face !

But who was *this*? that pulled back the purdah and came tripping into the room. A pretty little brunette, with a

Frenchified dress and an artificial smile. He rose and bowed, waiting expectantly for another figure—that was surely yet to come.

“I know you so very well by name,” said Belle, offering a pair of tiny (somewhat bony) hands. “My husband is always talking of Captain La Touche.”

Then this was the bride; he was in the presence of Mrs. Holroyd! At first he was so utterly confounded, that he could only sit down and stare into the crown of his hat. Belle attributed his evident embarrassment to the dazzling effect of her own charms, and immediately set to work to converse in her gayest strain, in order to put him at his ease. She was the first person who had ever thought it necessary to attempt this feat with Captain La Touche! As she chatted with her usual fluency, he

listened and looked. Truly, this is no shy girl of nineteen, but a woman ten years older, with a knowledge of the world, and a pleasant confidence in her own powers. He noted the elaborate elegance of her dress, the vivid beauty of her dark, animated face ; but, despite their long lashes, her eyes had a hard expression, and her thin red lips spoke of cruelty, and temper.

However, he dissembled his feelings (like the immortal stage ruffian), and talked and flattered and laughed, in his most irresistible company manner.

Belle, on her side, was agreeably impressed by her suave and good-looking visitor. She remembered that he had given them a handsome wedding present, and was inclined to be more cordial than brides usually are, towards their husband's bachelor friends. He discoursed of the

station, she of her passage out. He asked how she liked her house, and she enquired if there were any balls coming off, and if the ladies of Mangobad were young and pretty !

“ You must judge for yourself,” he returned diplomatically, “ you have brought us out one young lady, Miss Gay—Miss Rose Gay.”

“ Yes, and she ought to be called Miss Nosegay,” returned Belle smartly. “ You never saw such a feature out of *Punch*.”

“ Is she, then, not pretty ?” he enquired with arched brows.

“ Pretty, poor girl !” throwing up her hands, “ her face is so hideous that I am sure it must hurt her !” and she laughed, and evidently expected her visitor to do the same, but he merely smiled and said, “ At any rate she is very clever.”

“Of course she is, like all ugly people ; she is *said* to be very clever and good-natured ; for my part, I loathe good-natured girls.”

Mrs. Holroyd was outspoken, and not very amiable ; this sharp tongue might prove a dangerous element in a small station. Presently he rose and took his leave. As he was quitting the room, his eye fell on a large photograph of Betty. Belle noticed his glance, and hastening to take it up, said :

“Oh, you are looking at my cousin—my dearest friend ; she is a darling, not a beauty, as you may observe, but quite charming. I wish you could see her. I wish she was here.” Captain La Touche sincerely echoed the wish, as he bowed himself out, and walked down the hall. He had never been so completely mystified in all his life. His friend had dis-

tinctly told him, that he was going to marry Betty—and who was Betty's substitute?

On the steps of the porch he met George, who had just ridden home from the ranges.

“I see you have been making your salaams,” said he with well-affected nonchalance.

“Yes,” acquiesced his comrade. But for the life of him he could not utter another word. He looked hard at his friend, his friend looked hard at him, and, from what he read in Holroyd's eyes, he dared not ask the question that was burning on his tongue, so he got into his dog-cart in silence, and drove himself away.

Mrs. Holroyd's next visitor was the Collector, her namesake, Mr. Redmond. She knew that he was a rich, eccentric

widower, just the sort of person that would repay a little cultivation, just the sort of person to invite her out to camp, and to give her diamonds and ponies, for was he not Betty's uncle? She intended to make great capital out of her cousin, stand in her place and stroke his grey hair, and smooth his withered cheek, and call him "Uncle Bernard," but all these pretty little schemes were projected before she had *seen* Mr. Redmond. He was one of the relatives with whom old Brian had quarrelled most rancorously, and his offer to provide for his brother's orphan had been rudely scorned. In those days Mrs. Redmond was alive, and as she was not very enthusiastic about her husband's niece, the matter had dropped. But now Mr. Redmond paid an early visit to the bride, not so much to do her honour, as to enquire about

Betty. Bernard Redmond, Esq., C.S., was a tall, square-shouldered man, with grizzled, sandy hair, a somewhat saturnine expression, and a masterful individuality. He was intellectual and deeply read, open-handed, hospitable and eccentric, was well aware that he was considered "peculiar," and took an unaffected delight in acting up to his reputation. In spite of his so-called odd opinions, he was extremely popular, for he gave a good dinner, and unimpeachable wine, played quite a first-class rubber, and was a sound authority on horseflesh. Mr. Redmond brooked no contradiction, was autocratic, and extraordinarily outspoken—traits that grew upon him year by year, and were fostered and nourished at Mangobad, where he ruled not only the district, but the station, and was to all intents and purposes its "uncrowned king."

Belle's pretty smiles and speeches, her graceful attitudes, and waving hands, were absolutely wasted on this cynical person with the cold grey eyes. He listened patiently to her chatter, and her views of life, mentally exclaiming "Good Lord ! What a fool this woman is !" for the tone of her conversation jarred on him considerably ; there was a great deal too much about Mrs. George Holroyd. Nevertheless he received a glowing description of his niece, in which description Belle painted herself as Betty's adviser, sister, and benefactress, and then he put one or two somewhat sharp questions—questions are a natural weapon in malignant hands.

"I remember your father," he said : "he died when I was a youngster, about eight and twenty years ago. I suppose you were quite an infant at that time."

“Quite,” she returned somewhat sharply.

“Betty is nineteen,” he continued ;
“she has two hundred a year ; pray,
what becomes of her income ?”

“I cannot tell,” faltered Belle. “My
mother knows” (she truly did).

“And I gather that she is at Noone
acting as your mother’s sick nurse ?”

“She *lives* with mamma,” replied Belle,
reddening.

“Ha—Hum !” rubbing his chin reflectively. Then putting on his glasses, and staring round, “I should not have known this house.”

“No, I suppose not,” complacently.
“Pray, what do you think of my
room ?”

“Shall I really tell you what I think.
Eh, honestly and without humbug ?”

“Please do,” prepared for some charming compliment.

“I think it just like a bazaar, with all these pictures, and ribbons, and cushions, and fans. I cannot help looking for the tickets, and expecting to hear you ask me to put into a raffle.”

“Mr. Redmond,” exclaimed Belle, intensely affronted. “It is very evident that you have not been in England for some years, and possibly then you may not have been in a *drawing-room*, or else I believe you are as great a bear as old Brian.”

“To be sure I am,” he returned with a delighted laugh. “I have often regretted the loss I have been to the diplomatic service! Don’t you know that manners run in our family?”

“The want of them you mean,” indignantly. “This room is got up in the very latest fashion.”

“Like its mistress?” with a cool, deliberate stare.

“ Yes. *I* attempt to be civilised ! ”

“ And of course I know that I am miserably behindhand. A poor old mofussilite ! Pray what’s that thing ? ” pointing to “ Mossoo,” who was coiled up in a chair. “ Animal, vegetable or mineral ? ”

“ It’s my dog—a thoroughbred French poodle. I brought him with me.”

“ The latest fashion in poodles—I suppose. Eh ? ” focussing “ Mossoo ” with his glass. “ I wonder what the dogs out here will take him for ! How do you like India ? ”

“ Extremely—I don’t wish ever to go home ; I hope I shall live and die out here ! I love it better and better every day.”

“ You have only been out five weeks ; wait till you have been out for five years, and you have heard the brain fever bird, and felt the hot winds, and seen a few

snakes and scorpions ! India is not a country ; it is a climate."

"Thank you ! I am not afraid of your horrors ; I shall go to the hills, and I intend to enjoy myself in hills and plains, and to like India immensely. I suppose *you* were out here long before the Mutiny ?"

"The Mutiny ! Good gracious, my dear madam," exclaimed her visitor (whose one vulnerable point happened to be his age, and flattered himself that he did not look a day older than forty). "For what do you take me ? Long before the Mutiny ! Why I have only twenty-seven years' service."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not know ; but I daresay climate tells on people—you *look* old."

"Thank you," he responded quickly. "I see that you understand the art of

delicate flattery. Ah !” as a note was handed to her. “You have already begun to experience the real curse of India—chits, yes, ma’am—chits are the curse of India, and I will leave you to enjoy your epistle alone ; it is sure to be asking for something ; your company at a dull dinner ; the loan of a pattern, or of a saddle ; or a bottle of wine ; or a dose of medicine !”

“Not at all,” rejoined Belle, casting her eyes over it. “It is from Mr. Lovelace, sending snipe, and asking me to play tennis. I am afraid you take a gloomy view of life, and people in general.”

“I take a gloomy view of *some* people, I must confess,” and then he got up rather abruptly and made his adieux, and Belle had a disagreeable consciousness, that she had failed to make a good

impression. Visions of diamonds, and ponies, faded back into cloudland, and she laughed aloud, as she pictured herself daring to pat this gruff outspoken connection on the head, much less to stroke his severe, sarcastic-looking face ! As he whirled away, he remarked to his hot-tempered pony : “ She is like you, Judy, a Tartar, if ever there was one ! She will want a tight curb and a strong hand over her. Poor Holroyd. Unfortunate devil ! ”

Belle's other visitors were more appreciative, and they came, all the ladies in the Station, in their latest Europe bonnets, and all the inquisitive young men, in their neatest ties and boots, and they were charmed with the bride—the latter especially. She had such splendid eyes, and so much to say for herself, and was so unaffected and agreeable. Why

Mrs. Calvert and Miss Gay had not been *half* loud enough in her praises ! They had not prepared them for such an acquisition to Mangobad. True, when one or two enthusiastic subalterns at the Club had been eloquent on the subject of the lady's charms of person and manner, in the hearing of the Collector, he had merely grunted, and shrugged his shoulders, and called for a glass of "Kummel," but he was a regular old Diogenes, and no one minded his opinion, excepting on such matters as horses, whist, and wine.

Belle's letters home were full of her delightful new life, and her supreme happiness, and Mrs. Redmond read them to her friends, in a voice that shook with emotion. Her plans had succeeded far beyond her most sanguine hopes. In spite of what the Bible said, the wicked

did prosper ! After all, she had only done evil that good might come, and good *had* come. She did not fail to impart Belle's effusions to Betty—who listened with a white but smiling face—to Maria, and to Miss Dopping ; accounts of tiffin parties, dinners, and dances, given for her as a bride, and what she had worn, and how her dress had fitted, and who had taken her in, and what people had said ; also minute descriptions of her legion of servants, her house, her piano, her ponies, and her plate (a splendid and enlarged edition of the above was soon in circulation in the village), but there was scarcely an allusion to her lord and master. He was constantly on duty ; he seemed to have an immensity to do ; he looked ill, and had quite lost his spirits ; he took no care of himself, and she intended to carry him off to some gay hill station for a complete change.

“It was not Belle’s custom to talk of anything that was near her heart,” explained her mother. “She is extremely anxious about him, I can see, but her feelings are not on the surface.”

“Nor anywhere else,” muttered Miss Dopping ; then aloud : “It strikes me that she seems a good deal *more* anxious about getting the creases out of her velvet dress ! However, I am glad you are pleased. If she was my daughter, I’d rather hear less about her clothes and more about her husband.”

* * * * *

Belle’s triumphs had not been much over-rated. She was quite the latest novelty, and the acknowledged beauty of the station. Young men were proud to be her partners in ball-room or tennis court. She was vivacious, amusing and accomplished ; and her pretty dresses and

her pretty speeches disarmed her would-be rivals. She took the place by storm as on board the *Nankin*, and no entertainment was complete without Mrs. Holroyd ! She acted, she sang at penny readings, she composed people's fancy dresses, she played the harmonium in church, and was secretary to the tennis club. In fact, as old Sally Dopping would have said, "She had a finger in every pie." Her restless spirit, and excitable temperament, supplied her with sufficient energy to revolve in one untiring whirl from morn till midnight. She was always *en course*. She drove to the club before breakfast to read the papers and gossip ; early in the afternoon, she went forth again, regardless of the sun, a syce holding an umbrella over her head, and "Mossoo" sitting sedately in the cart beside her, to tiffin parties, teas, or tennis ; then there were rehearsals

for concerts, theatricals, choir practice, moonlight picnics and balls. For these latter Belle filled in her programme (in ink) days previously.

Home was the place where she slept, and breakfasted, and sometimes dined, but home was not where she "lived" in the true sense of the word. In it she expected no happiness for herself, and made none for others. Pleasure was her god, and to this she carried the sacrifice of her life. With constant gaiety came an incessant hunger, a craving for more. Not content with Mangobad she sighed for other fields to conquer ; she went to this station, and to that, for the annual "Week," to Lucknow for the cup-races, to Allahabad for balls, bearing her husband in her train. Gay, vivacious, pretty, a born actress, a matchless dancer, Belle, as she playfully expressed it, "took" ex-

tremely well. George gratified all her whims, patiently hung about ball-room doors till the early hours of the morning, carried her wraps, cashed her cheques, went her messages, and gave her freely and liberally of everything—except his company. For the first time in her existence, Belle was absolutely contented. This really *was* life—a life well worth living, a glorious realisation of all her hopes. But would it last?

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. HOLROYD DESIRES TO LOOK INTO THE
PAST.

“He has paid dear, very dear, for his whistle.”

ALAS! This gay butterfly life was not permanent! Before six months had passed, Mrs. Holroyd had ceased to be the joy and delight of the station. Before a year had elapsed, she had figuratively thrust a torch into her own roof tree, and set Mangobad in a blaze.

The honeymoon had barely waned, before George Holroyd discovered that he was married to an insanely jealous woman, with an ungovernable temper, and an untrammelled tongue. He had seen her tear an ill-fitting dress to shreds with the gestures of a maniac, he had seen

her strike her ayah, and stamp at himself. True, she had subsequently offered a rupee to the ayah, and sobs and apologies to him, and that these outbreaks were always followed by scenes almost equally trying—fits of hysterical remorse, but the future looked gloomy, very gloomy. Belle was not in love with her husband, brave, handsome, and honest as he was. She would have (privately) jeered at the idea. She had a vague notion that she had been in love once—years ago—that she was constant to “a memory”—a gross mental deception; her first love was with her still, and confronted her daily in the glass. Were the choice given her to be torn from her husband or “Mossoo,” it would not have been “Mossoo.” But he was a good-looking, presentable appendage, whose polo playing and hurdle racing reflected

credit on herself. Since his marriage he had given up tennis and dancing, and to this she made no objection, for it kept him somewhat aloof from ladies' society. She could not endure to see him speaking to another young woman. She, herself, was to be admired by all ; he was to admire no one.

As for George, he was woefully changed ; he had become silent, solitary, and perhaps a little cynical. He had done his utmost to be a good husband to Belle, believing, in his folly, that she had been desperately in love with him, but he was soon disabused of *this* error. When at home, Belle was generally recruiting her exhausted powers ; she read, and yawned, but rarely talked ; and, when abroad, she never noticed her husband save to make jokes at his expense, and to send him on her errands. Many a day when he

returned from barracks, fagged and weary, he found the bird flown, the nest empty, and the bird's absence a relief. "Mem Sahib bahar gaya." The Mem Sahib was much too nervous to ride ; she did not care for driving along monotonous roads, that led nowhere in particular. The splendid sunsets, the waving fields of yellow rice and millet, the majestic clumps of forest trees and picturesque rivers, with the cattle swimming homewards at sunset, had no charms for her, nor the dazzling flight of green parrots, nor the teak trees' feathery flowers—nor the *tête-à-tête* with George ! No, no, she much preferred to bowl down to the club to hear the latest "gup," display her dresses, and play tennis. And her husband spent his time among the racket, and whist and billiard players, as if he were a mere bachelor (Oh that he were !) At public and private enter-

tainments, his wife constantly made him the hero of her little stories, and the butt of her malicious jokes. This he bore without wincing, but when she levelled her shafts at others, he protested most emphatically.

One night they returned late from a large dinner party, where Belle had made herself surprisingly disagreeable, and had shown more than a glimpse of the cloven foot. Possibly something had irritated her—a supposed slight, a tight shoe, or it might be, what Miss Dopping would have called “just pure divilment.” George followed her into the drawing-room, resolved to speak sternly, and to scotch the fire at once.

“Belle, what possessed you to-night?” he asked in sharp incisive tones, unlike his usual manner.

“What do you mean?” she snapped, turning on him quickly.

“ You told Mrs. Craddock, who has fiery hair, that you never trusted a red-headed woman ; they were invariably deceitful and ill-tempered.”

“ Yes, quite true, so they are.”

“ You told Colonel Scott that you despised all black regiments.”

“ So I do.”

“ You gave Mrs. Lundy, in polite words, the lie.”

“ I did far worse than that ! ” exclaimed Belle triumphantly. “ When we were all in the drawing-rooms afterwards, and talking of the fancy-ball, they appealed to me about Mrs. Mountain’s costume. I said she was so large, and her face was so red, she might wear her usual dress, with a paper frill round her neck, and go as a round of beef ! And only fancy ! She turns out to be Mrs. Lundy’s *mother* ! Laugh, George, *do* laugh.”

“No, certainly I shall not laugh. I am like Mr. Redmond. I never see a joke after ten o’clock at night, even where there is one to see. I was amazed at you this evening ; you abused people’s friends, you abused my regiment. If you cannot restrain your tongue, we won’t dine in public again.”

“Who says so ?” she demanded scornfully.

“I do,” he rejoined with resolute determination.

“Pooh ! you can stay by yourself then and I shall go alone, and all the better !” and she tossed her head with a gesture of defiance.

“If you do, it will be only once.”

“Why ?”

“Because I shall send you home,” he answered with prompt sternness.

“Send me home. Ha ! ha ! ha ! What

a joke. To whom—to your mother?” and she burst into a scream of laughter.

“No, to yours.”

“I would not go—I will never go.”

“We would soon see about that.”

“Yes, we would. I would shriek, and scream, and have to be carried to the railway by force. I would make a scene at every station between this and Bombay; and if you *did* get me on board, I’d return in the pilot boat. No, no. Husband and wife should never be separated. Nothing but death should part them—nothing—but—death—shall—part—you and me,” she concluded with laboured distinctness.

“Belle, you are talking nonsense; talking like a fool.”

“Am I? but I am not such a fool as to go to the hills, or to hateful Ballingoole, and leave you here to flirt with Janie Wray.”

“Miss Wray !” he echoed ; “ I have scarcely spoken ten words to her in my life.”

“ You see her out with the hounds when I cannot look after you ; you gave her the brush—and I am told that she says you are the handsomest man in the station. She had better not let me see her flirting with you, that’s all,” she concluded excitedly.

“ Miss Wray—it’s too bad to talk of her in this way ! on my honour she is no more to me than that picture on the wall.”

“ Nor am I !” cried Belle fiercely. “ Nor any woman ! I don’t believe you care a straw about me. I don’t believe, in spite of the letter you wrote, that you ever loved me. Come——” suddenly walking up to him, “ be honest, answer me.”

“ I married you—that is my answer,” he replied after a pause.

“ True, and I had no money—my face was my fortune,” exclaimed Belle, gazing at him thoughtfully. “ And yet I sometimes think that you are capable of *une grande passion*, of being desperately in love. Were you ever in love before you met me? Was there ever any other girl, George?” she exclaimed in a much sharper key. “ George, speak! Why do you look so white? There *was* some one——”

“ Do I ever ask to look into your past?” he interrupted impatiently.

“ Then it's *true*—you have admitted as much. Who is she? Where is she? Have I seen her? Is she alive?”

Belle's eyes flamed like two lamps as she seized his arm and shook it violently.

“ Ah—you won't tell me! George, if

I dreamt that you cared for her still—I could kill her, do you hear? you had better keep us apart, you know I have a high spirit,” and the lines of her face twitched convulsively.

“I know you have a high temper,” calmly removing her hand. “And it is rather late hours for heroics. If you will take *my* advice, you will leave my past alone—you will be more amiable at future entertainments, and you will now go to bed.”

* * * * *

Belle was not very robust ; according to her mother she had a great spirit in a frail body, and according to Captain La Touche “her engines were much too powerful for her frame.” Her folly in braving the sun, and her life of ceaseless activity, began to tell ; long before the hot weather was heralded in by that most

obnoxious of the feathered tribe, "the brain fever bird." She suffered from fever and ague—her face became sallow, her eyes sunken, and her figure lost its roundness and her thin red lips their smile.

The climate of India is said to be trying to the temper, but Belle's temper was trying to the whole station. Once the novelty of her new house had worn off, she began to harry her domestics, with merciless energy; she was unreasonable, unmethodical, and capricious; and deplorably mean about small things. She foamed at the mouth over a lost *jharun* (duster), fined transgressors relentlessly, and in one great gust of fury, dismissed the whole respectable black-bearded retinue, without wages or character, but they gave her a fine character in the bazaars, and she subsequently discovered that no good

self-respecting servant would engage with her, even if for double wages. By the time she had been six months in Mangobad her household troubles were the joke of the place, but they were no joke to her husband ; to him they were a most tragic reality. Belle began her day at six o'clock by bursting out of the house with a shriek at the milkman ; then she had a painful scene with the cook and his accounts, and the daily giving out of the stores was looked upon as a sort of "forlorn hope." Belle had always been what Sally Dopping termed, very "near" in her ideas—save with respect to outlay on her own little luxuries and personal adornment ; and this trait in her character had developed enormously of late, and pressed sorely on her unlucky retainers ; she weighed out each chittack of butter, and each ounce of sugar, with her own fair

hands ; there was no latitude allowed in the matter of “ghee,” and she made searching enquiries after empty bottles, and bare bones.

Only the bravest dared to face the Mem Sahib ! Every egg, every bottle of lamp oil, every seer of gram, was figuratively fought over, and only wrested from her and carried off after a severe action. Naturally, it was but the very worst class of servants who would engage in her service—the incapable, drunken, dishonest, or miserably poor. She soon picked up sufficient of the vernacular to call them “idiots, pigs, and devils,” and had a dreadful way of creeping unexpectedly about their godowns, and pouncing on them when they were enjoying the soothing “huka” at unlawful hours. Not a week passed without an explosion, and dismissal ; in six months

she had thirty cooks ; George's life was wretched, especially since Belle had been compelled to relinquish some of her amusements, and had taken so fiercely to housekeeping ; squalid meals (an hour late), dusty rooms, insolent attendants, and the shrill voice of the wife of his bosom, storming incessantly. Their little dinner parties covered him with shame and confusion, and although Belle, gaily dressed, talked and laughed vivaciously, and subsequently sang, what talking and singing can appease a hungry man ? Mysterious soups, poisonous entrées—half full of cinders, a universal flavouring of mellow ghee, and, on one immortal occasion, cod liver oil handed about as a liqueur. Belle always declared that this particular “faux pas” was the act of a diabolical “khitmatgar,” who did it for spite. Be that as it may, it was but

cold comfort to those unhappy guests who had swallowed a glass of noxious medicine, as a kind of “chasse” to a gruesome dinner! Mrs. Holroyd’s temper developed month by month. Hasty speeches, furious retorts, combustible notes, dislocated various friendships. She quarrelled with the chaplain about a hymn—with Captain La Touche about a waltz—disputes over newspapers, tennis, flowers, precedence, embroiled her with half the station, and here she could not shift her sky, as in the good old days, when she roamed about with her mother, and their lives were a series of hegiras. No, it was now George’s unhappy lot to be apologist and peacemaker, to interview angry and insulted ladies, and to draft copies of humble letters—occasionally the effect of these epistles was minimised, by Belle’s surreptitious postscript, “I don’t mean this

letter in the *least*, but George made me write it."

Poor George ! once (*only* once) he got out his revolver, and handled it meditatively ; but no, what about his mother, and the regiment, and Betty ? No, to take his own life would be the act of a coward. A climax came at last when the tennis tournament was in full swing. Belle played with her usual skill and vigour, but at lawn tennis it is a fatal mistake to become feverishly excited, and to lose your temper. Belle lost hers, and also the ladies' doubles. She fought desperately hard for the singles, the general and friendly interest in her adversary goading her to frenzy ; after a most exciting match, she was beaten by one point, and in a transport of disappointment and rage, launched an anathema, and her racquet, at her opponent's head.

The Mangobad community was kind. They talked of "a touch of the sun," and Belle was really laid up with intermittent fever. The doctor conferred with George, and recommended Mrs. Holroyd a *complete* change of scene and a sea voyage ! In short there was a universal feeling that either she, or the rest of the population, would have to leave the station—and she went.

Belle had a cousin in Melbourne, who (having never seen her) had sent her more than one pressing invitation. This invitation was now graciously accepted, and George escorted his wife and "Mossoo" down to Calcutta, put them on board a P. and O. in charge of the captain, and returned to Mangobad, a free man. Yes—for six months he was a free man ; and he hoped that his joy was not indecently manifest.

He shut up his house, and departed on a two months' shooting trip with Captain La Touche. It was quite like old times, and, by mutual consent, they scrupulously avoided the remotest allusion to a certain absent lady. They became two collarless vagabonds. They went into Thibet, and had capital sport, and returned to the station at the very last hour of their leave, sunburnt and satisfied, thirsting for regimental soda-water, and the latest regimental news.

The travellers had scarcely entered the mess, and hardly exchanged greetings with their friends, when an officious comrade rushed at George open-mouthed, saying : "*Your wife is back*, arrived three days ago ; she only stayed a week in Australia."

"What ?" stammered George, turning pale beneath his tan.

“Yes—I saw her yesterday. She returned in the same steamer, and is very fit. She loathed Melbourne, and said she knew you could not get on without her.”

Alas ! This was no hoax—it was painfully, pitifully true (and there was a unanimous impression that Garwood might have kept his news till George had had his breakfast). Belle spent exactly ten days with her cousin—a strong-minded forcible woman, who told her some very wholesome facts, and made no objection to her premature departure. Belle detested Melbourne, and her relative—was afraid that George might be flirting (Poor George ! he had had a lesson for life)—gave out that her health was completely restored, and that her husband was miserable in her absence, and so took ship.

But her Australian trip was of benefit to Mrs. Holroyd in more ways than one !

She was more reasonable, more manageable, and more mild.

Long-suffering Mangobad noted the change with the deepest gratitude to Belle's unknown kinswoman, received the prodigal politely, and signed a treaty of peace.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. REDMOND'S CONFESSION.

“ I'll tell to thee my hopes and fears,
And all my heart to thee confess.”

—MAXWELL.

THE flame of Mrs. Redmond's life flickered along unsteadily from day to day, and month to month. She was now entirely bed-ridden, and the strain of constant nursing wore Betty down a good deal. Occasionally Maria Finny came and spent an hour or two in the sick room—and subsequently spread alarming reports in the village, where deaths and births were the only exciting events ; a marriage was rare indeed. Once she even went so far as to assure Mrs. Maccabe, that the dying woman “ could not possibly put over the

night," and to request that a very superior sirloin (then hanging in the shop) should be immediately set aside for the funeral breakfast ! but when Maria hurried to Noone the next morning she found the invalid not merely alive, but better—better and fretful.

"Ah," she said in answer to Maria's query, "I was bad enough yesterday—yes, you thought I was going—I could have died if I *liked*, long ago, but I am holding on—holding on—at least till the next mail comes in."

All she seemed to care for now was the Indian mail, but how many mails come in and brought her no letters ! Belle was enjoying herself without a thought of her. It was Betty who was her real daughter, the girl whom she had wronged. Every one else was going from her, and she was going from every one !

The old lady was not in a happy frame of mind, she was filled with remorse now.

Betty's determined refusal of Ghosty Moore had opened her eyes, but had occasioned no surprise to Miss Dopping. That excellent lady had her own private views, and was truly concerned to see her young friend so hollow-eyed and pale, so different from what she used to be ! But Betty never uttered a word of complaint, and she struggled along bravely under the heavy tasks imposed on her ; she was a-foot all day—the first to rise, the last to go to rest, therefore Miss Dopping drove over one afternoon to have a serious talk with Mrs. Redmond, about getting a professional nurse to take some of the load off Betty's shoulders, but the miserly patient turned a deaf ear to her suggestion. A trained nurse would require

wages, she would certainly eat—possibly she would drink porter !

“ Betty,” she declared, “ did very well. Betty liked nursing. Betty could manage alone.”

And as the wish was father to the thought, Mrs. Redmond believed it, and relapsed into her normal condition of torpid selfishness.

“ I don’t know what I should do without her, or what she will do without me,” she groaned. “ It’s a great trial that she won’t look at Ghosty Moore. She has refused him twice. I can’t understand her, and the Moores so fond of her, and such a splendid connection, and for Belle too. It’s too bad of Betty. Have you any idea of her real reason ? ”

“ I believe I have,” replied Miss Dopping with unexpected promptness. “ I always thought that George Holroyd

was in love with Betty, and that she had a fancy for him." As she spoke she looked sharply at her questioner, and Mrs. Redmond's face betrayed her; she was weak, and had lost the command of her countenance.

Her eyes fell, her lips twitched nervously, a faint guilty colour stole into her pallid face.

In a second, the astute old maid had guessed all, and felt disposed to deal with her companion as Queen Elizabeth did with the Countess of Nottingham, and shake the dying woman in her bed, and declare that "God might forgive her, but she never would!"

"Then it *was* Betty?" leaning forward and speaking in a hoarse whisper.

"It was," returned the other in a still fainter key. "Now you know my secret—keep it."

“No—not from Betty—in all justice to George Holroyd, she shall know that he is a man of honour and did not break his pledge. Woman ! what possessed you to ruin two lives, and peril your own immortal soul ?”

“Belle is happy—I did it for her,” protested the culprit.

“And is every one to be sacrificed to Belle ! And *is* Belle happy ? I know Holroyd is not ; other people can write besides his wife. The Moores’ niece says she would never have known him—he has grown so silent and careworn, and as to Belle, I need not tell you what her temper is ! Nor that she cannot keep a servant, or a female friend. She is the scourge and heartscald of the station.”

“He paid her great attention,” faltered Mrs. Redmond. “She fully expected his offer.”

“Not a bit of it,” returned Miss Dopping scornfully. “She paid *him* great attention. I only hope she is half as attentive to him still ! Does she know ?”

“No one knows but Holroyd and myself.”

“It was a bold game for an ailing old woman ! I have no doubt the devil helped you. How did you do it ?”

“I gave Betty’s letter to Belle—I had only to change one word.”

“Well, you must tell Betty at once.”

“Don’t you think she is happier not to know ?” faltered the invalid.

“Don’t I think that you are a wicked, treacherous old creature ! She has blamed the wrong person for more than a year. Take your sin on your own head. If I were the girl, I would never forgive you. You have ruined her life and his. It would never surprise *me* if he took to

drink, or if he were to shoot Belle. I believe *I'd* shoot her, if I was married to her."

"What nonsense you talk, old Sally Dopping!" exclaimed the invalid angrily. "George is a sane, respectable man; he has got a very pretty, accomplished wife, and as to Betty—she is young——"

"She is, and before she is a week older she shall know that George Holroyd kept faith with her."

"I can't tell her—I won't tell her," protested the culprit irritably.

"Very well! it would come better from you than me; you may sweeten your story—I shall not. I give you three days' law, three days to make up your mind—not an hour longer."

And then Miss Dopping arose, holding herself unusually erect, seized her umbrella, and marched straight out of the room

without another word—without even the formality of “Good afternoon.”

* * * * *

Mrs. Redmond endured Miss Dopping's daily “Have you told her?” for a whole week, before she mustered up her courage and spoke. It was at night time, when the house was closed and silent. Betty had been reading the Bible, seated at a small table, with the lamp-light falling on her face—a face that could not be implacable.

“Betty,” began the invalid suddenly, “I have something important to say to you. Open my dressing-case—the key is in it, and take a letter out of the flap.”

Betty rose and did as desired. Mrs. Redmond received the letter with a shaking hand, saying, as she did so :

“Sit down and tell me something,

Betty. Did it ever occur to you, that George Holroyd liked you ? ”

Betty, who had been standing hitherto, sat down, and faced her questioner with silent lips and piteous eyes.

“ How could he ? ” she said at last in a very low voice. “ He married Belle.”

“ Yes, Betty, he did, and I must ease my mind and confess a great wrong to you before I die. He married Belle because I made him marry her.”

“ You !—I don’t understand.”

“ You know that Belle was my idol ever since she was born. I would have died for her. I was prepared to make any sacrifice for her. I—I sacrificed *you* ! ”

Betty leant her arms on the table, and gazed at her aunt with a colourless face.

“ The letter I gave to Belle was yours, addressed under cover to me, to Miss Elizabeth Redmond ; he only mentioned

your name once. I was sorely tempted ; the letter would apply equally well to Belle. I blotted out that word. I gave it to her, and now she is away at the other end of the world, dancing and singing and amusing herself, whilst you are the only comfort of the wicked woman who spoiled your life. But Belle fretted so dreadfully, her heart was set on change. She never dreamt that he cared for *you*. His proposal to you would have been an awful blow. I dared not tell her ; you remember her attacks—her violent nervous attacks ? A doctor once told me that her frenzies bordered on insanity, and that any sudden nervous shock might—might—Betty dear,” lowering her voice, “you and I alone know—though we have never, never spoken of it—that sometimes she was a little strange—not quite herself.”

Betty recalled, with a shiver, one dark winter's night, when, after a day of terrible depression, Belle had appeared suddenly in the study, her hair wet, a table knife gleaming in her hand, and an odd wild look in her eyes. "Do you know what I have been doing?" she asked triumphantly.

"I felt that I must do something or go mad. I saw Maggie going out to the poultry yard with a knife and a candle. I went with her. I killed a fowl. I cut its throat. I *liked* doing it! Yes, I did."

"Betty—Betty do not cover your face," pleaded Mrs. Redmond. "Are you very, very angry?"

"Oh, what is the good of being angry?" moaned the girl, with a long shuddering sigh, and the old lady noticed that tears were trickling through her

fingers. Tears not wholly of grief. It was balm to her wounded heart to know that, though lost to her for ever, George had not been false, nor she willingly forsaken. He had been faithful. Poor George !

“Of course I know you will never forgive me,” whimpered Mrs. Redmond. “You will go away, and leave me, and I shall die with no one near me but a strange hospital nurse, who will rob me out of the face. Oh ! I am sorry I ever told you. It was all old Sally’s doing. She *made* me.”

“No—no—aunt, do not be afraid that I shall desert you ; but oh ! what must he think of me ? ”

“He knows all. I wrote very plainly, and here is his letter to me—keep it. It was a bold venture sending out Belle. I wonder I had the strength and nerve to

go through that awful time. Supposing he had refused to marry her, and she had been cast adrift helpless and penniless ! I declare I never had a real night's rest until I got the telegram to say that the wedding was over."

" You might have trusted him ! "

" Yes, especially when I told him that you were soon to be married to Ghosty Moore, and had never given him a thought."

" Oh, Aunt Emma ! "

The girl's voice was sharp with pain, and she trembled from head to foot.

" Yes, indeed, I stuck at nothing ; but then I must say, that I had no suspicion that you liked George Holroyd, and I was confident that you would accept Augustus Moore. I wrote everything quite frankly to Holroyd—and he married Belle."

“Does she know?” enquired Betty faintly.

“Know? Oh, no! and never will; but after all I am afraid they are not very happy. He is sure not to understand her temper—it’s all over so soon too, and, poor girl, she is always sorry. Betty, you must promise me solemnly that he shall never know that *you* know.”

“What does it matter?” she returned. “We shall never meet again, but whether or no, I can make no promise.”

“I—I suppose you would not go out to Belle?”

“*Aunt Emma!*”

“You know she is always wishing for you; she is a jealous girl, and of course if she knew, she would as soon have the plague in the house! Well, I must say, Betty, you have taken it beautifully; you are a dear good child; come and

kiss me. I shall sleep all the better for having a load off my mind, and when you have settled the fire, and fixed the night-light, and given me my draught, you can go."

Mrs. Redmond slept peacefully that night, with heavy long-drawn snores, but Betty sat hour after hour in her window, with dry, tearless eyes, looking out upon the stars that seemed to return her gaze with sympathy, and shone with a frosty brightness. She was still sitting there when they began to pale. The next time Miss Dopping came to Noone she found Maria closeted with Betty, whilst the invalid was asleep.

"No letter from Belle this morning, I suppose?" enquired the old lady.

"No, but I heard of her," returned Maria with eager volubility. "I was at the Moores' yesterday and met their

niece, who is just home from India. She saw Belle lately ; she has lost every scrap of her looks, and is as yellow as a kite's claw ; her temper has worn her to fiddle-strings, and they are as much afraid of her out there as if she were a mad dog ! As to Holroyd, you would never know him ; he is as grave and as silent as if he were at a priest's funeral. I always knew it would be a miserable match."

"Oh, *you* say that of every match, Maria," rejoined Miss Dopping. "I don't believe half I hear. What about this new tea of Casey's ? Have you tried it ?"

"No," snapped Maria, who saw that the topic was disagreeable, and naturally pursued it. "I can't tell you anything about the tea, but I would be thankful if you would tell me, *what* possessed young Holroyd to marry Isabella ?"

Miss Sally's glance met Betty's.

Betty blushed, and she read in the girl's eyes that the tale had been told.

"He was no more in love with her than he was with *me*," continued Miss Finny emphatically. "Do you think she had any hold over him, or knew some secret in his past about money, or——?"

"Murder! say it out boldly. Secret in his past indeed," repeated Miss Dopping. "Tut, tut, Maria! I could not have believed that a woman of your age could be such a fool, but of course there's no fool like an old one." Nevertheless Miss Dopping glanced somewhat nervously out of the corner of her eye at Betty. But Betty was staring into the fire.

A few days later Mrs. Redmond had passed away tranquilly in her sleep, with all Belle's letters—no great quantity—under her pillow, and Belle's most flat-

tering photograph grasped in her rigid hand.

* * * * *

Mrs. Holroyd received the news of her mother's death in her usual extravagant fashion. She wept, and raved, and screamed, and roamed about the house in her dressing-gown, with her hair loose, subsisted on sal-volatile and champagne, and angrily refused all comfort. She ordered the deepest mourning, and tied a wide black ribbon round "Mossoo's" neck.

At the end of three days, she went out driving for the sake of her health, and despatched a very business-like letter to Betty, respecting her darling mother's rings, and plate, and household effects. At the end of the week, she was playing tennis with her usual vigour and agility, and at the end of a month, even to her

husband's surprise, she was talking of leaving off her crape, and regretting that she could not take part in some theatricals, and society (not easily scandalised) was shocked to see Belle subsequently give way to precisely the same violent outbreak of grief over a dead monkey as she had recently displayed at the death of her mother ! And in future, society tapped its forehead and looked significant when it spoke of Mrs. Holroyd.

One afternoon, not long after her double bereavement, Belle was amazed and flattered to hear that the Collector Sahib was at the door, and to receive Mr. Redmond's card. He had come solely to talk to her about his niece Betty, he informed her with his usual bluntness. "Where is she now ?" he enquired, as he carefully selected a seat. "Tell me all you know about her." Now that Mrs.

Redmond was dead, he was resolved to assert his claim as her nearest of kin, and to import her to India as his companion, housekeeper, and adopted daughter—for, in spite of the tempting snares that were spread for him, he had no inclination to marry again.

“She is at Ballingool with Miss Dopping. I wanted to have had her out, but George is so queer, he says married people are best alone.”

“Some are,” assented Mr. Redmond, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

“And although she is not very pretty, not the least like *me*, she would be quite a beauty among the hideous girls that are here. I’d have seen that she made a good match, and not married a wretched subaltern like George, but a Bengal Civilian like yourself. Don’t say that *I* never pay you a compliment !”

"Thank you," he replied, in his driest manner. "Tell me one thing, Mrs. Holroyd, does she resemble you in any way?"

"No," rejoined Belle with a triumphant laugh, "you would never dream that we were related. We are as opposite as the poles, and the same people never like us! I mean people that like Betty, hate me, and *vice versâ*. She is tall, and has grey eyes and rides splendidly, and is quite a cook. *You* would appreciate that! She has wonderful spirits, and the nerves of a man, but she is not really pretty, or taking; she is not sympathetic with men; in fact, poor mother—she was so partial—always said she was a capital foil for *me*."

"I can easily believe it," he rejoined with an irony that was completely lost on his fair listener. "And what about her temper?"

"No one has ever seen her angry in her life—really angry, you know—of course she is cross now and then ; she has that serene disposition that, mother said, always went with an insipid character."

"Your description enchants me ! I delight in insipid people," exclaimed Mr. Redmond, rubbing his chin quite fiercely. "Ha, hum ! a good cook, a good rider, plain, insipid, and serene. I shall write by the mail to-morrow—I am her nearest of kin—and ask her to come out and live with me."

"Oh, you dear, darling, delightful old man !" cried Belle, springing from her seat. "Oh, you angel, I declare I should like to kiss you, I really should."

"I beg, madam, that you will do nothing of the sort," backing away as he spoke. "And let me ask one thing. For goodness' sake don't go gabbling my

plans all over the station. I hate to have my private affairs discussed by a pack of women, and besides, she may not come. She may prefer Ballingoole and Miss Dopping."

"Miss Dopping will *send* her out—she thinks Betty is lost in Ballingoole. She often said so. She is sure to come! And to what a delightful home. Carriages, horses, and everything. I suppose you will give her the blue room? Can I help you to get it ready? Do tell me, can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, keep my news to yourself, that is all you can do. You may tell your husband, of course."

"Oh, I shall not mention it to a soul, you may rely on that; it shall be a dead secret between you and me. It will be capital fun. I shall keep it as a grand surprise for George."

CHAPTER VI.

A GRAND SURPRISE FOR GEORGE.

“There is no armour against fate.”

—SHIRLEY.

“Behind no prison gate, she said,
Which slurs the sunshine half a mile,
Live captives so uncomforted
As souls behind a smile.”

—THE MASK.—MRS. BROWNING.

A FEW people in the station knew that the Collector was expecting a niece, but the news never reached George's ears. He did not frequent the ladies' room at the Club, nor other likely sources of general or particular information. Belle hugged her secret in silence, as far as he was concerned, and implored Captain La Touche (who had his suspicions about this other Miss Redmond, and was prepared

to stand by for some frightful domestic explosion) not to breathe a word on the subject. It was to be a grand surprise for George.

Mr. Redmond himself escorted Betty from Bombay, and the morning after their arrival Belle hurried over at an early hour, to greet her cousin, whom she nearly smothered with her caresses. She looked critically at Betty, as they sat over "chota hazree" in the pretty fern-lined verandah, and she told herself that her cousin was much changed. She was more composed, more self-reliant, and—was it possible?—dignified. She carried herself with quite an air of distinction, and was remarkably well dressed. Belle would certainly think twice before patronising, bullying, or storming at *this* Betty. And how Belle's tongue ran on. She scarcely gave her companion time to answer a

question ; volubly setting forth her delight at her arrival, the condition of her own health, the state of her wardrobe, asking in one breath what sort of a passage she had had, inquiring for the Finneys and Moores, and how hats were worn ; giving hasty and not always pleasing sketches of the other ladies in the station, and winding up with an imperious command to come over and see her bungalow, “only next door, only in the next compound.”

Betty assented, saying with a laugh, as Belle took her arm, “I don’t even know what a compound is ; it might be a lake or a parish.”

Mrs. Holroyd had done up her house in honour of her cousin’s arrival ; rearranged the draperies, replaced the palms and re-adjusted the furniture, and proudly convoyed her from room to room.

“You will find George a good deal

changed, very gloomy and silent," she remarked, as she displayed his dressing-room, with its rows of boots and saddlery. "My dear, you never know a man's *real* character till you marry him. In old days he used to be rather jolly, now——" and she turned up her eyes, and threw up her hands dramatically, "he is like the chief mourner at a funeral. By the way, Betty, why did you not marry Ghosty Moore? You were mad to refuse him! I warn you that you won't do *half* as well out here."

"But I don't want to do half as well," returned Betty gaily.

"You don't mean to say, that you are going to be an old maid?"

"Why not? I am convinced that I should be a delightful one."

"Rubbish! I know the style. God-

mother to every one's horrid baby ; sick nurse to all the wheezy old women ; *confidante* in love affairs ; peace-maker, and general consoler in times of domestic affliction. Ugh ! sooner than play such a rôle I'd die."

"No, no, Belle, you have a kind heart, you would play your part more creditably than you pretend."

"Look here, Betty," she exclaimed, inconsequently, "has he said a word about the diamonds ? I suppose not yet—unless he mentioned them in the train. I mean your uncle, of course, and of course they will be yours. What a dry old creature he is. Quite gritty. Has he taken to you, dear ?"

Betty blushed, and before she had time to answer, Belle added :

"He told me not to chatter about you ; and only fancy, George does not

know that you are expected, much less that you have *arrived*."

"What !" exclaimed Betty, her blush deepening to scarlet. "Oh, Belle, you are not in earnest !"

"To be sure I am in earnest. I kept it as a surprise for him," and as the sound of clattering hoofs was heard rapidly approaching—"Here he is."

She and her visitor were already in the hall, as George cantered under the porch, and she ran to the door, screaming out, "George, guess who is here. Guess, guess !"

He, supposing it to be Captain La Touche, or some other brother officer, stood for a moment giving orders to his syce, and then turned to ascend the steps.

But who was this to whom Belle was clinging ? His heart seemed to contract ; his head felt dizzy—as he recognised

Betty. Betty, grown to womanhood, and prettier than ever. In one lightning flash he contrasted the pair before him. The little dark, sallow woman, with the shining teeth and tropical eyes, who was the wife whom fate had sent him, and the pale, slight, graceful girl, who was his first love, his heart's desire, the wife that he had lost !

George, as he gazed, became as white as death ; he slowly raised his chin-strap, and removed his helmet, and ascended the steps with much clattering of sword and spurs. He could not speak, were it to save his life. The situation was too strong for him. He ventured to look at this rather stately maiden, expecting to see certain disdain, and possibly hatred in her eyes, but no, she met his gaze with a glance of unaffected friendship, and actually offered him her hand.

“George,” cried Belle excitedly. “How funny you are! *Don’t* you remember Betty? This has been my secret, and you don’t know what it has cost me to keep it, but I thought that it would burst on you as such a delightful surprise.”

George found his tongue at last, as he said in a level, expressionless voice: “This is indeed a most unexpected pleasure! When did you arrive?”

“Last evening by the mail,” rejoined Betty with desperate cheerfulness.

“I little guessed when I heard yesterday that Mr. Redmond had gone to Bombay to meet a lady who that lady was. Belle,” turning to his garrulous wife, “I see that you *can* keep your own counsel.”

“Can I not? Betty, you may trust me with all your love affairs. I am sure you have had at least *one*, and you will find me a most discreet *confidante*.”

“How did you leave them all at Ballingoole?” enquired her husband precipitately.

“Very well, just as usual.”

“And did you see my mother lately?”

“Yes, just before I started. I have brought you a small parcel from her and Cuckoo.”

“I suppose Cuckoo is growing up.”

“She is grown up, in her own estimation; she wears long dresses and has abolished her pigtail, and is really quite a nice-looking girl.”

At this statement, Belle broke into a peal of derisive laughter, and said, “And pray what has become of Brown, Jones and Robinson?”

“Poor Brown is dead; he died of apoplexy, just like any rich old gentleman. Mrs. Finny has taken Robinson, and Miss Dopping, Jones. I was think-

ing of bringing him out, but I did not know whether Uncle Bernard liked dogs."

"And now you know that he is a dog-ridden man—dogs clamouring at his table, dogs at his heels, dogs everywhere."

"Yes, and all fox terriers, but none to compare with Jones. Uncle Bernard has told me to write for him, and as he is a dog of independent means he can pay his own passage. By the way, as I don't see him, I suppose 'Mossoo' is dead."

"*Dead*," echoed Belle in her shrillest key. "How dreadfully unfeeling you are, Betty! Do you suppose for one moment that you would see me laughing and talking if I had lost him? No, thank goodness! 'Mossoo' is in splendid health; this is his morning for the barber. If anything were to happen to 'Mossoo' it would break my heart. I always hope that I may die before him."

“ Oh, Belle ! ” exclaimed her kinswoman in a shocked voice. “ I see you are just as bad as ever, and now,” opening her white umbrella, “ I really must be going. Uncle Bernard will think that I am lost. Good-bye, Belle. Good-bye, Mr. Holroyd,” and she went down the steps and walked quickly away, with Belle’s last sentence ringing in her ears :

“ Not Mr. Holroyd, Betty ; you must call him *George*.”

* * * * *

George had stood listening to his wife and her cousin like a man in a dream. Was it real—was this girl Betty ?

How bright and merry she was, how her eyes sparkled and smiled—was she a marvellous actress, a woman with matchless self-control ; or else had she never cared ? Most likely she had never cared.

She was young, and happy, and free,

whilst he was bound, and fettered, and wretched.

“Well, George,” said Belle angrily, “I really think you might have offered to walk back with her, I do indeed. It’s rather hard on me that my husband can’t be civil to the only friend I have in the world. Do you dislike her?”

“No, why should you suppose so?”

“Then why did you not *talk*? Why were you so stiff and ceremonious—so different from what you used to be at Noone? You hardly spoke to her, and she is like my own sister; you might have kissed her. I am sure she expected it.”

“And I am sure she did nothing of the kind,” he returned sharply, and then he went into his writing room, closed the door and took off his mask.

This was the refinement of torture, the devil himself had arranged this meeting!

Surely his lot was bad enough as it was—a squalid home, a scolding wife, a broken career. For staff appointments were inaccessible, he would not dream of applying for one. People would as soon have the cholera in the station, as the notorious Mrs. Holroyd—and now, as the crown and flower of all his sorrows, here was Betty, come to witness the misery, the horror, the daily heart-sickening humiliation of his married life, and would naturally say to herself:

“It was for *this* he forsook and forgot me.”

And she would never know. He must be for ever silent. In his mind's eye he saw Belle, with her irrepressible tongue, throwing a lurid light on their domestic life, on their quarrels, on their social misfortunes, and on all his shortcomings. At the very thought he clenched his hands fiercely and great beads of pers-

piration stood out on his forehead. He saw his future, the future he had chosen, stretching out before him—an awful, barren waste. He saw that he had made a hideous mistake, and the iron of a great despair entered into his soul.

* * * * *

“So you have been over the way *already?*” exclaimed Mr. Redmond as his niece joined him. “Why, you look quite pale, the journey has knocked you up, what possessed you to go out?”

“Oh, I am not the least tired ; it is no distance ; and you know we are very old friends. Belle came to fetch me.”

“As long as she does not come and fetch *me*, I don’t care. Yes, my dear, I don’t like your cousin ; thank goodness, your very distant cousin. She is the only drawback to Mangobad.”

“Oh, Uncle Bernard, I am so sorry to hear you say so.”

“Do you like her?” he asked incredulously.

“Yes, of course I do,” returned Betty. and she believed that she was speaking the truth.

“Well, my dear, you are the mistress of this house, and I wish to see you make yourself at home and happy. Have her here as much as ever you like when I am away, but I entreat and implore of you to keep us apart, I am afraid of my life of her. I am not joking—I am paralysed by the mere terror of her presence, I give you my honour—I am indeed.”

In one respect George's prognostications were correct. Belle made Betty her *confidante*. She went over to see her daily, to “chota hazree” or tiffin or tea—

always at hours when the master of the house was at Cutcherry. She liked to turn over Betty's dresses, to unburthen her mind, and to drive out in the Collector's easy landau, and under the wing of the Collector's pretty niece worm her way back into social importance. (No one recognised an effort on Betty's part, and she only knew it herself, when she realised what a relief it was to be alone with her uncle.) This was the bright side of the shield ; it had its reverse. It was hard to see a girl, who had always been in the background, placed above her, living in a luxurious home, driving in London-built carriages, presiding at splendid dinners, and attended by obsequious and numerous chaprassies. Luckily for her own peace, the new queen gave herself no airs ; she was as kind, as generous, and as sympathetic as ever, but

on one subject she refused, fiercely refused, to sympathise—*George*. She would never listen to a word against him. Once she turned a white resolute face on Belle, and said very sternly :

“You say that he is an excellent husband, nurses you when you are ill, gives you everything you ask for, presses you to buy new dresses, and to go to the hills, has never begun a quarrel, never gambles, drinks, or flirts; what do you want?”

“He is all you say, but he is odd. He—only to *you* would I tell this, Bet—”

“Don’t, don’t, I won’t hear it!” cried her companion passionately, and putting her fingers up to her ears.

“It’s nothing bad,” screamed Belle, pulling away one of her cousin’s hands. “It is only this. George, I daresay, likes me as well as most men like their

wives, and he is far more polite and considerate than one out of fifty, but I am sure he has never been in love with me. There is no harm in telling you what is true. I cannot grumble, for I have never been in love with him; we are not really sympathetic. He is scrupulously polite, and attentive and kind, but he hates 'Mossoo.' I have heard him *swear* at him, and he is so reserved and undemonstrative. There is a veil across his heart that I have never been able to tear aside. He as good as told me once, that he *had* liked some one—and once means always with him, he is so pig-headed! Oh, if I only knew who she had been, or who she *is*," and her eyes blazed dangerously, "how I could hate her. I suppose, Betty, you have no idea? You know the Malones so intimately. Did they ever drop a hint?"

“Never,” she responded in a low, quiet voice.

“Oh, well then I can’t make it out ! I should have thought you might have known—you were such friends with that odious little tell-tale Cuckoo—and that if anyone could have told me, it would have been *you*.”

CHAPTER VII.

A STORY IN HER EYES.

“Her eye in silence hath a speech,
Which eye best understands.”

—MORLEY.

BETTY was considered quite an acquisition in the station (though, after its recent experience, the station was somewhat inclined to be coy in its reception of fascinating strangers). True, she neither sang nor acted, but she was pretty, young, and bright, played the hostess with surprising success, and rode well forward with the Bobbery Pack on her uncle's well-known racing pony, “Leading Article.”

She received friendly advice about her health, and her ayah, and the necessary

precautions to preserve her clothes, and her complexion, in the spirit in which it was meant, and was as popular as her cousin was the reverse.

Strange to say—or perhaps it was not very strange—she rarely saw George Holroyd save in the distance at polo or gymkhanas. In three months' time they had not exchanged three sentences. He was as distant, and as formal, as if they had never met before, and she was secretly hurt to notice that he avoided her purposely. But he could not avoid her on that miserable occasion, when she came to a dinner, given in her honour, at his own house.

The guests were twelve in number, and included, besides the Redmonds, Captain La Touche, the Calverts, and Miss Gay, also the Judge and Mrs. Pope—the latter, an elderly lady, with a

generous face and fine head, a woman good to know and look at, a woman to be relied on, and whose heart was so large that she could even spare a morsel for "poor queer Mrs. Holroyd." The table was prettily decorated (by Betty), and there was no unfortunate mistake about the Chartreuse *this* time, but it was not a pleasant entertainment; the hostess was in a bad temper, the "plats" were abominable. Mr. Redmond was unusually "gritty"; to be frank, the Collector liked his dinner, he had had a long day at Cutcherry, and he was hungry, but this was dog's food—"rateeb."

Belle, with a touch of rouge on her cheeks and a feverish sparkle in her eyes, talked and laughed incessantly, with an occasional fierce aside to the servants, and a deadly thrust at her husband. She had strung up her nerves with a strong

dose of sal-volatile, and her sallies spared no one.

Poor George ! Was he happy with the wrong woman at the head of the table, and the right woman on his left hand ?

“ George,” screamed the former, “ just look at that wretch, he is handing round port instead of claret. He has given Miss Gay port and soda water, but *you* don’t mind what they do, nor help me one bit ; as long as you can smoke and shoot, *you* are satisfied ! ”

During this agreeable speech everyone commenced to talk with feverish animation, so as to drown Mrs. Holroyd’s shrill voice. When the port was carefully and properly handed round, she began again :

“ Betty,” she exclaimed, “ don’t you think George has become very quiet ? I notice that you and he have hardly

opened your lips ; is he not silent to what he used to be ? ”

“ Perhaps, like the parrot, he *thinks* the more,” growled Mr. Redmond, figuratively drawing his sword.

“ Perhaps so, and like the parrot I shall have to give him a red chili to make him talk,” rejoined Belle smartly.

“ He could not be in better hands,” retorted the Collector, “ no one so capable as Mrs. Holroyd, of giving him something *hot*.”

Belle affected not to hear this pleasantry, and, turning to Captain La Touche, said abruptly :

“ What is that French riddle you have just given Miss Gay ? ”

“ Oh, a mere bagatelle. I will give you one for yourself if you care to guess it.”

“ I delight in French riddles, you know I am half French ! ”

“Then listen to this,” counting on his plump white fingers.

“Mon premier c’est un Monstre,
Mon second c’est un Tyran,
Mon tout c’est le diable lui Même.
Mais si vous aimez mon premier,
Vous ne craindrez pas mon second,
Et mon tout c’est le bonheur suprême.”

“I give it up,” said Belle, after several ineffectual guesses, “although I am generally very good at them, and at all conundrums. It sounds rather odd. Is it quite *proper*?”

“Proper ! My dear madam, the answer speaks for itself ; the word is *Mariage*.”

“Mon premier c’est un Monstre—Mari,
Mon second c’est un Tyran—age,
Mon tout c’est le diable lui Même.”

“Yes, yes, I see, not at all bad,” she exclaimed condescendingly, but she did not demand another French riddle ; there had been a disagreeable significance in

Mr. Redmond's expression, as he repeated "Mon tout c'est le diable lui-même." "Talking of marriages," she said, "I hear there is an end of Miss Lightwood's engagement to Captain Holster of the Pink Inexpressibles. Mr. Proudfoot told me, you know the horrible way he talks. He said that the regiment had headed him off, and that she was not 'classy' enough, or up to the form of the corps."

"Indeed, it is the first I have heard of it," returned Captain La Touche with some animation.

"Yes, I see you are delighted ! Your eyes twinkle at the news, you horrid selfish bachelor ; if you had your way, no officer would marry."

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Holroyd, you must not give me such a character."

"But I must ! I believe you think there ought to be a sort of committee on

every girl before a comrade is allowed to propose to her. I wonder if you would have passed *me*? You don't answer; then I shall take silence for consent?"

"Such a novel suggestion took my breath away, and deprived me for the moment of the power of speech. I am dumb, simply because the question is so utterly superfluous."

Belle smiled and tittered, accepting this double-edged compliment entirely from Lord Chesterfield's point of view, and then addressed herself to her other neighbour. She had already heard him, at an early period in the feast, saying to his servant, as he gave his plate an impatient push:

"Here! take this away; get me some dry toast," and now he was turning and re-turning his pudding with a palpably scornful spoon! As she watched him she felt her heart grow hot within her.

“I am afraid you have no appetite,” she observed in her sharpest key. “I *thought* you were looking rather yellow and out of sorts.”

“Never felt better in my life, hungry as a hunter ; but, my dear madam, *what* is this new dish ? Did you make it yourself ? ”

“A *vol au vent* of plantains, you dreadful *bon vivant*. Is it true that your first question every morning is, to ask how the wind is, to see if your club mutton may hang a day longer ? ”

“A base libel, an invention of the enemy,” he returned emphatically ; and, so saying, he seized his glass, dashed a quantity of sherry into his plate, and hastily gulped down its contents. Then, as he caught the fiery eye of his hostess, he saw that she was working herself into a frame of mind that might be

troublesome, and said with his blandest air :

“ I notice that you have a pair of fine new pictures,” screwing his glass into his eye. “ I have not seen them before.”

“ Yes—I picked them up at an auction, and I am rather proud of my purchase, though George there,” with a withering glance at her husband, “ says that the Alps by moonlight might be taken for some haystacks round a puddle, and that lovely sunset at sea, for a dish of eggs and bacon. Now tell me your opinion of them frankly ; for I believe you *do* know something about art ! ”

“ As well as I can judge from this distance, and, in fact, not being much of a judge at any distance, I should say that these pictures are oil paintings of some notoriety. And in fact, rather remarkable productions. I give you my word

of honour I have not seen anything *like* them for a long time ; you have secured something quite out of the common——”

“ Ah, really,” looking steadfastly into his grave, impassive face. “ Well then, since I have had your opinion, I shall promote them to the drawing-room in future. I shall promote *myself* there now.”

And presently she and her lady guests arose and departed. When the gentlemen rejoined the rest of the company, there was the usual after-dinner music. Belle opened the concert with a sparkling little ballad, and Betty played one of Scharwenker's wild, weird Polish dances, that seemed to set every one thinking of their past. Miss Gay sang by special request “ Forever and Forever.” As her rich and sympathetic voice rang through the room, with its too appropriate words, Betty bent her face over a book of photographs, and

never once raised it. Her head ached, she was nervous and constrained, and despite her subsequent efforts to be gay and conversational, more than one remarked "that pretty Miss Redmond seemed pale and out of spirits." She was most thankful when Mrs. Pope rose, and gave the signal for her own release. She had been figuratively on the rack all that miserable evening. The exposé of George's wretched home wrung her very heart. If Belle had made him happy, if there had been no shame for her in her thoughts, no pity for him, it would have been different, oh ! so very different. She would not—she was sure—have felt this dreadful tightness in her throat, and this insane impulse to burst out crying. The worn-looking, grave young man who escorted her down the hall, but did not offer to put on her cloak, could he be the same

George Holroyd that used to take her and Cuckoo out schooling through the fields behind Bridgetstown, and make the keen wintry air ring with his cheery laugh ?

“ Well, George ! How do you think it went off ? ” enquired Belle, when the last guest had taken a peg, a cheroot, and his departure, and she threw herself yawning into a chair.

George stood with his hands in his pockets, and looked intently at his boots, and made no reply.

“ I think every one enjoyed themselves : it was quite a success. How do you think Betty was looking ? ”

“ Oh, as usual,” without raising his eyes.

“ Of course you don’t admire her, I know ; she was pale to-night, but maybe that was her dress ; pink does not suit

Betty. Mrs. Pope has taken such a fancy to her."

"Has she?"

"She is nearly as enthusiastic as Sally Dopping; she thinks Betty is so pretty, and interesting-looking! And what *do* you think the funny old woman says? She declares that Betty has a story in her eyes."

"A what? A sty in her eye?"

"A *story* in her eyes! Isn't it a preposterous idea? I asked her what she meant, and she nodded and smiled in that exaggerated way of hers and said: 'I am sure I am right, ask her to *tell* it to you, my dear!' It was on the tip of my tongue to say, that *she* had a story in her mouth, for you know as well as I do, that Betty never cared for anyone in her life in that way; a story in her eyes indeed!"

As Mr. Redmond and his niece walked home, with a lantern carried before them as a precaution against snakes, he said : "Thank goodness that's over and we need not go again. Betty, is there any cold meat in the house ?"

"Yes, cold corned beef, a nice hump."

"Good ! What a dinner ! What courage Holroyd had to marry that woman ; he ought to be decorated with a V. C. What a temper she has."

"Yes, it's rather hot certainly."

"Hot is no name for it. Holroyd acts as a sort of fire-engine between her and the station. Poor chap ! I often see his eyes fixed on her at dinners with a sort of desperate apprehension as to what she will say *next* ! I wonder what possessed Holroyd to marry her. Do you know ?"

No answer.

“She is not young, she has no money, her looks are going. She can talk, I grant you ! It is a pity that such power of utterance is not united to more intelligence ; in many ways she is an absolute fool.”

“Oh, no, Uncle Bernard, indeed she is not,” protested his companion. “She may not be what you would call intellectual, but she is very bright, she has plenty of sense.”

“If she has sense then heaven help those who have none. Well—well—she always rubs *me* up the wrong way. I don’t believe she has an ounce of brains, but you think differently, and we won’t fall out. We will never fall out, you and I, Bet ! You are an amiable girl, and make allowances for everyone, and can be happy and at ease even with that woman in the next compound.”

But what, oh most learned yet ignorant Collector ! what about the *man* in the next compound ?

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. REDMOND'S AMBASSADOR.

“ Words that weep, and tears that speak.”

—COWLEY.

GEORGE HOLROYD avoided the ladies' room in the Club, the groups of ladies under the trees outside ; he did not play tennis, and, owing to his wife's mourning, he was not on duty at dances ; therefore he and Betty rarely met, unless they came across one another out hunting.

On these matchless Indian mornings and evenings, when they drew the brakes and nullahs, and found ; when there was a sound of horn and a rush and clatter of hoofs among the long grass and cane stubble, away over the plains, scattering dust and sand on the bye-roads, away,

away after the wiry little grey fox with his black-tipped brush, and the fleeting, irregular pack of all sorts and conditions of dogs, Polygars, Rampore hounds, pariahs and fox terriers. Through the fields, scattering the cattle, through the woods, startling the fruit watchers, through shallow rivers, rousing the submerged water buffaloes. How good it is to be young, with every pulse throbbing, every nerve straining, away to where a little cloud of dust and a momentary scuffle, betoken a kill in the open.

Tippoo and Sultan, the long-legged Polygars, have overtaken and slain the fox. Poor Mr. Fox ! You will never see your little family again, will never again bring them home a tender guinea fowl, or a fat pea chick ; they will sit at the sunny side of the bamboo clump and watch for your return in vain. Your

thick, black-tipped brush hangs at Miss Redmond's saddle-bow, as she turns homewards, leading the van, charging through melon-fields, scouring over tracts of sands, jumping nullahs, fording rivers. But Mr. Holroyd, who was well to the front during the run, now reins in his hot-tempered Australian and lags conspicuously in the rear—Why? Only he and Betty knew the reason.

About six weeks before Christmas Mr. Redmond went out into camp for what is called the "cold weather tour." It is a Collector's duty to visit his tahsils or out-stations, and examine the general condition of his district, receive petitions and inspect tracts affected by flood or famine; it is thus that he sees the result of his previous six months' government. Mr. Redmond departed from Mangobad, with the usual pomp and imposing train of

camels, tents, horses and elephants, and Betty accompanied him. It was all new to her—a delightful novel life, and a blessed relief from the painful strain of her daily existence in cantonments, where the vicinity of George, and the perpetual presence of Belle was—only to her inmost thoughts did she whisper it—becoming insupportable. She enjoyed the change and complete freedom ; the glories of a tropical dawn ; the early marches through strange surroundings ; the halts in the mango topes ; the keen exhilarating air, and at night the great wood fires. She was left a good deal to herself, and this she enjoyed also, whilst her uncle conferred with his sleek serishtadars, received thousands of petitions, and dallies ! strings of evil-smelling yellow marigolds, and sweet pink roses, and many visits from native gentlemen, on

elephants or in palanquins. During these solitary hours, she read, or worked, or wandered about the adjacent jungle, in company with her own thoughts. Truly nature is a great physician of souls ! The peace of the place descended into her heart, and soothed and hushed its repinings, as she drank in the exquisite atmosphere, the living silence of the jungle, broken only by the sound of her own footsteps, as she strolled beneath the Kuchnar, and sweet-smelling cork trees—treading tenderly on their fallen, withering flowers. She determined to be brave, to shut her eyes to the past, to make the best of the present, and of the new life that lay before her. She was only twenty, and she would not permit one misfortune to shadow all her days. She was resolved to make a second start, but she did not want a second

lover. No ! Although she assured herself emphatically that she had now no other feeling for George than sisterly affection, and intense pity, she meant to figuratively lock up her heart and throw away the key. She would not, and could not, bestow it on Mr. Hammond, Mr. Redmond's friend—clever, agreeable, and popular as he was. No, nor on Captain La Touche, nor yet on Mr. Proudfoot. She would be her uncle's life-long companion, she would bury the past, she would bear with Belle, and would think more of others and less of herself, and her own troubles. These, and many other good resolutions, came flocking round her as she strolled about the camp by day, or sat outside the tents—whilst Mr. Redmond dozed in his chair—staring into the big red fire in the still, cool night—a stillness only

broken by the baying of pariah dogs in distant villages, the howl of the hungry, melancholy jackal, the shouts of the watchers in the fields scaring wild beasts from the crops of sugar-cane, bajra and jowar. But life was not always quiet and solitary. When the camp happened to be within a reasonable distance, many well-known faces from Mangobad surrounded the great, blazing logs, and many familiar voices broke the usual majestic silence.

The hospitable Collector invited out most of his friends, and Betty asked Mrs. Holroyd, but she remained only two days. She detested rural life, and so did "Mos-soo." She hated the spear grass that got into her petticoats and stockings, suspected snakes under every chair, and became hysterical on an elephant. She longed for her own safe fireside, her book

and her arm-chair. Her husband had declined altogether, pleading duty. But one evening Mr. Redmond came across Captain La Touche and him, out shooting, and absolutely refused to take nay—it was Christmas Eve—he had at least twenty guests—he intended to have twenty-two—Mrs. Holroyd was in Lucknow, and Mr. Holroyd had not the ghost of an excuse ! There was a grand Christmas dinner—with pretty Indian jungle decorations, real English plum-pudding, a monster turkey, and plenty of crackers, and good wishes. Afterwards the company set out in the moonlight to explore the camp, and visit the elephants and horses, before assembling around the great log fire to drink punch or mulled port, and play games. The night was clear and cold ; and wrapped in a long red fur-lined cloak, Betty strolled

now with one guest, now another, and finally found herself pacing the short dry grass—beyond the tents, with her uncle and George Holroyd ! It was a magnificent Eastern night—such a night as entitles India to be called the land of the moon, as well as the land of the sun. The scene was almost as bright as day, and almost as still as death. Behind the Collector lay his snow-white camp beneath the mango trees—before him, a plateau, on the edge of which a mosque-shaped tomb stood out in dark relief against the sky—beyond the tomb, a wide plain, stretching away to the horizon, a rich cultivated tract, unbroken by aught save an occasional clump of sugar-cane, an occasional reedy jheel, with its fringe of waving water plants, and here and there, a great single forest tree.

“How quiet it is out here,” said Betty ;

“there is not a sound save the night-jar. I quite miss the bugles at Mangobad.”

“Can you distinguish them?” enquired George.

“No, I don’t think I can—except that one that seems to say, ‘come home—come home—come home.’”

“The last post,” explained her uncle. “I know them all down to the advance, ending in three C’s. How many a gallant fellow *it* has cost us! Did you get any snipe to-day, Holroyd?”

“Yes, but only four brace.”

“I went out yesterday, myself, to a most lovely spot, an ideal home for a snipe, and never saw a feather! Just a nice cover; nice feeding-ground. If I were a snipe, I would go and settle there at once, and take my family with me.”

“Is it possible that I see people ploughing at this hour, uncle?” interrupted

Betty. "Six ploughs—beyond that brown patch."

"Very possible ! In the indigo season, it's a common thing for them to plough all night. I suppose it is ten o'clock now. That reminds me that I have business with my sheristadar, and I must be going back, but you, Betty, need not come. Take Holroyd on and show him the tomb, it's rather old and curious," and turning quickly on his heel he left them abruptly ; left them to their first *tête-à-tête* since they had parted that July day in the avenue at Noone.

"I must congratulate you on getting your company," said Betty as they walked on together. "I heard the news just before dinner—I am so glad."

Glad she might be, but she could scarcely command her voice. Oh, why had Uncle Bernard left them ? left her

without a pretence of escape. She must make the best of the situation, and summon all her self-possession and all her woman's wit, to keep clear of one topic.

"Thank you. Yes, everything comes to those who wait."

"Belle will be delighted," she ventured in a sort of panic, fearing that if she stopped talking he would commence on that subject.

"Yes," and he added with somewhat dreary levity, "she does not care about being 'a subaltern's poor thing.'" A long pause, during which their own footsteps on the baked, dry grass, was the only sound.

"I had a letter from Cuckoo last mail," continued the girl, making a valiant effort to keep up the conversation; anything, anything, but this dead suggestive silence.

"Yes, and I had one from my mother.

Denis is coming home. He cannot get any congenial employment, and he and Lizzie don't seem to hit it off."

"I am sorry to hear it, but these hasty marriages do not often turn out well." She halted abruptly—her companion's own marriage had been a hasty one—and then plunged into another subject.

"I saw you and uncle discussing something very serious this evening before dinner. When uncle nods his head, and walks with his hands behind him, I know he is talking of something interesting and important."

"Yes, you are quite right. He was talking of *you*."

"Of me?" with a sort of breathless gasp.

"He has got some wild idea that I have influence with you, and he asked me, as an old and entirely disinterested

friend—not likely to have a woman's love of match-making—to speak to you about Mr. Hammond.”

“To speak to me about Mr. Hammond ! I am utterly sick of hearing about Mr. Hammond. Uncle, Mrs. Pope, Mrs. Calvert, can talk of nothing else.”

“He is not young, but he is not old,” continued George, “he is a remarkably able man, he will be in Council some day, he is an honourable upright gentleman. I quote your uncle's words exactly, and your uncle, although he cannot bear to lose you, says that Hammond is his personal friend, and he does not wish to stand in the way of your making a good match, and he asked me to speak to you, as an old acquaintance, and to beg you to think it over. Think of your carriages, and diamonds, think of all the ladies old enough to be your mother,

who must walk behind you into a room. Think." They had now reached the tomb and were standing at its horse-shoe shaped entrance. He stopped abruptly, and leaning his shoulder against the wall behind him, looked hard at his companion.

"Does it not seem strange," he went on in a totally altered voice, "that such a mission should be entrusted to *me*—of all men living?"

Betty affected not to notice the change in his manner, and said with her calmest air, and in a firm tone :

"I like Mr. Hammond immensely as a friend, but he is thirty years older than I am, and I do not choose——"

"To be an old man's darling !" supplemented her companion sharply.

"No—I was going to say, change my estate. I am very happy as I am,"

lifting her eyes from the moonlit plain, and looking straight and full at her questioner.

“ Yet I don’t mind betting that before very long you will disappear from Mangobad amid a cloud of rice, and with the inevitable slipper on the top of the carriage. Proudfoot is not so ancient.”

Mr. Proudfoot was a handsome and superlatively conceited young man—(his conceit probably the result of an uncriticised career)—who played the banjo, and sang sweetly, and constantly assured his lady friends that he had been *such* a pretty boy. He paid Betty conspicuous attention, and was at this moment eagerly searching for her in every direction, but she and her companion were standing on the far side of the mosque steps, and its substantial walls were between them and the camp.

“Shall I tell you a secret?” said Betty suddenly.

“Do,” he returned with a slight start, but recovering himself instantly.

“I cannot endure the Golden Butterfly” (Mr. Proudfoot’s nickname).

“Why—what has he done? Has anyone told you anything?”

“He has told me everything himself,” she returned with a smile into the grave face beside her. “He dined with us, one evening; we had the Trotters to dinner too, and he confided to me, as we sat behind the piano, that when he was at home—I must try and quote his own words as you did uncle’s—he met Mrs. Trotter in the Park, and she came bustling up to him; ‘for the life of me,’ he said, ‘I could not remember her name, though I remembered her face and dinners, for when I was at that hole,

Sonapore, she was there, and I used to be in and out a good deal. But by George ! Sonapore is one place, and London is another, one does not come home to see one's *Indian* friends, eh ? I was not going to allow her to fasten herself on to me, and such a dowdy too ! So I just took off my hat, and walked on—cut her so to speak, and now, *she* cuts me !' What do you think of such a nice, grateful, gentlemanly young man ?”

“I am not surprised—my opinion of him remains unchanged ; but he still seems to find favour in *your* eyes—he sat beside you at dinner and appeared to make himself agreeable.”

“He bored me to death, about society at home, and his clubs.”

“Clubs ! I don't believe he ever belonged to one in his life, except a *Mutton Club*”—remarked Captain Holroyd

scornfully. A ghurree in the camp now struck ten, and turning to her abruptly, he said in a voice that made her heart stand still :

“ Betty, let us drop this hideous farce for five minutes, this Christmas night, and speak plainly to one another, face to face. I wonder that you look at me, much less talk and laugh with me, when I know what you think of me at the bottom of your heart. Wait”—seeing that she was about to speak—“ I never was so astonished, as when I saw you on our own steps. I had not a suspicion that you were coming out. Had I known, I would have got an exchange ; got leave, got *anything*, that would have taken me out of the station, and out of your sight, and you actually offered me your hand—but some women are angels ! ”

"I am no angel," returned Betty almost inaudibly, "far from it. Do not let us speak of the past, it is done with, it is dead. There is no reason why we should not be friends."

"Then, Betty," he exclaimed, looking at her keenly, "*you know?*"

Betty did not speak; she turned away her face, and gazed over the great far-stretching landscape, bathed in moonlight; she saw nothing of its placid beauty, for her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"Answer me," he insisted.

She bowed her head without looking towards him.

"Who told you?" he asked after an appreciable silence.

"Mrs. Redmond," she replied in a choked voice. "She gave me your letter to her, before she died."

“Betty, did I—did she—nearly break your heart?”

“It is all over now,” she returned in a low voice.

“Abominable old woman! As long as I draw breath I shall never forgive her.”

“Oh, George, do not say that; you must forgive her, you will forgive her. I have done so long ago. It is all over, and done with *now*, for ever.” As she spoke her sweet firm lips were set in a line that was almost stern.

“Over and done with for you—never over for me. But why should I expect you to care? the past, as you say, is dead, dead and buried. However, it is some comfort to me, to hear that you know that I was not a heartless scoundrel.”

“I never thought that,” she returned with a tremor in her voice.

“And I, miserable fool, never doubted

a line of Mrs. Redmond's letter. I accepted it all with unquestioning conviction. I knew that Moore was in love with you, and as you were lost to me I married Belle. Belle, who came out to be my wife in all good faith, believing that I loved her, and assuring me of her own attachment. She was your cousin. She was homeless and friendless in this country, and totally unsuspecting of her mother's crime—for it *was* a crime—I could not send her back, shamed and slighted, to Ballingoole. I did what I believed any man of honour would do—I married her. I did not care what became of the rest of my life—and I gave it to her, no great gift!—and I honestly meant to make the best of things for her sake—but oh—my God—!” he exclaimed hoarsely—“if I had only known the truth!”

Betty listened, with white parted lips, and then said in a low voice: "And *she* must never know."

"No—of course not. I am glad I had this chance of speaking to you at last, and thankful for what you tell me—to hear that you knew the truth—to know that you did not feel——"

"Not feel," she echoed with a start, and a thrill in her voice. "George, I too will speak, just once—and never again. It cannot be wrong to tell you now—that it did nearly break my heart, it was so unexpected, so sudden, and I was—" she was about to add "so fond of you," but looking into her companion's penetrating dark eyes, she faltered—"I could tell no one—I had to bear it alone—no one knows—no one ever will know, only you and me! But I could not let you suppose that I did not feel—and,

George, as it is all over now—as it was not to be—let us not be cowards.”

“No,” he interrupted fiercely. “Once I was going to shoot myself, but you see I thought better of it.”

“Let us not be cowards,” she repeated with quivering lips. “Let us make the very most of our lives, and try and make other people happy. When I hear of you doing something good and noble, that will be *my* happiness.”

Tears were very near the beautiful eyes, that looked with sad wistfulness into his.

“And when I hear of your marriage with some wealthy Civilian,” he sneered, “I suppose that is to be *mine*.”

“Oh ! George,” she exclaimed, with two large tears now trickling down her face, “don’t talk in that way. It is not like you ! You once told me that a man

could be whatever he willed—man is man and master of his fate—you are still the master of yours.”

“My fate was too strong for me ! Mrs. Redmond herself, like one of those ancient witches, cut it across with a pair of shears. It is not her fault, that I have not gone to the devil. I believe I shall get there yet.”

“No, you are only saying this to frighten me, and I am not afraid. You will make the best of your life. You will forgive and forget.”

“Never !”

“Yes—I know you better than you do yourself although you *are* so changed !” the last words came in a kind of sob.

“Changed !” he echoed with sudden compunction. “Yes, but not so changed as to behave like a brute to you ! Forgive me, Betty—I will—I do—try to

forgive, but I shall not try to forget. I will shake off, if I can, the sort of deadly paralysis that comes over me—I shall volunteer for our next little war. As for you, whatever good luck you have”—and he gulped down something in his throat—“no matter in what shape it comes—and whatever happiness may fall into your life—it will be good fortune and happiness for me. Betty, do you remember Juggy at the gate lodge? She said you had a lucky face! And I have a strong presentiment that you were not born to trouble, but that you have many bright days in store for you somewhere. As for myself——”

He paused, for Mr. Proudfoot, still searching, had suddenly turned the corner of the tomb, and stood within three yards of him. It was almost on that young man's lips to say “I beg your pardon,”

for Holroyd was as white as death, and Miss Redmond had been crying. Yes, she had actually her handkerchief in her hand, although she exclaimed, with wonderful composure, "Oh, Mr. Proudfoot, I am quite ready. I suppose uncle has sent you to look for me. I had no idea it was so late. I must go back at once," and she hurried down the steps, accompanied by the two men. Half way to camp, they encountered Mr. Redmond, who called out in his loud, cheery voice :

"Well, Holroyd, what do you think of the tomb? Rather fine, is it not? They say it was built by Jahangir." Holroyd muttered something inarticulate. Neither he nor Betty had cast one single glance at the object of their walk. They might as well have been standing beside a blank wall, for all the interest they

had taken in this tomb, which was one of the sights of the district.

Betty went straight to her tent, and was seen no more that evening, and George departed from the camp at day-break. The reason of this sudden move was explained by Mr. Proudfoot in the strictest confidence to some half-dozen listeners :

“Holroyd and Miss Redmond had had no end of a shindy, and he had walked into the thick of it behind the big tomb—no doubt that little devil Mrs. Holroyd had made some mischief between them.”

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING TO READ.

“And thereby hangs a tale.”

—OTHELLO.

WITH the first appearance of punkhas, and the first “notice about ice” most of the people at Mangobad fled away to Simla, Mussoorie, or Naini-Tal—chiefly to Naini-Tal. Mr. Redmond’s face was an amusing study (in black) when Belle suggested in her most kittenish and effusive manner, that “she should share a house with him, as George could only get two months’ leave, and that it would be great fun to live together!” but Mr. Redmond grimly declined this unalluring proposition in a few brief words, and subsequently (purposely) took a mansion

that set the whole length of the lake, and a distance of two miles, between his abode and Mrs. Holroyd's cheap, damp, out-of-the-way little bungalow—for Belle was now nothing if not economical, and thrifty, to the verge of parsimony, save in the matter of her personal adornment. Naini-Tal, named after the goddess Naini (or Nynee), is a lake that lies six thousand feet above the plains, in the lap of the Himalayas ; the surrounding hills rise from the edge of the water and are covered with houses half hidden among trees. These houses are reached by narrow paths, in some instances goat tracks, and the only means of locomotion is either on a pony's back, or in a jhampan or dandy, carried on the shoulders of four men. A jhampan—the gondola of the hills—is something between a chair and a coffin, and, to an uneducated eye,

the first glimpse of Naini-Tal, with its crowds of people being borne along, suggests the victims of some frightful colliery or railway accident. But a nearer inspection shows smartly dressed ladies, reclining in gaily painted dandies, and borne by jhampannies in gorgeous liveries. Each memsahib dresses her bearers brilliantly, and racks her brains to devise some novelty that will distinguish her from the rest of her neighbours ! You can descry her while she is yet afar off. You know where she is calling, and where she is shopping, when you see her blazing team squatting outside—with the surreptitious *huka*—awaiting her reappearance. Now you meet a green and yellow set, next a scarlet and blue, after that, an orange and crimson, jostling others who are all orange. What burlesques of family liveries ! What travesties of monograms

emblazoned on the bearers' broad chests ! Naini-Tal is a pretty place, especially by moonlight, or when the surrounding hills are reflected in the lake. It is in the shape of a cup, or a great extinct crater, and you have to climb a thousand feet to get a view of the line of everlasting snows, commanded, as it were, by Nunga-Devi, the " Storm Goddess," standing out sternly against the steel-blue sky. The only flat space is the Mall round the lake, and the polo ground. There are lovely walks, if you do not object to stiff climbing, and once arrived you find yourself, as it were, lost in the woods, among moss and rocks and overhanging trees with thick fringes of ferns covering their outspread branches. Here you get a peep of the lake—there of the distant blue plains. True, these walks have some drawbacks. They are excessively slippery

in damp weather, and panthers lie in wait for dogs (and are particularly partial to fox terriers), moreover, greedy leeches accompany the unsuspecting pedestrian to his, or her, own house. Naini-Tal is gay ! What popular hill station is not ? Balls, races—yes, races—regattas, and picnics ; theatricals, tableaux, and concerts all succeed one another in rapid succession, and when early in May new arrivals come swarming up from the plains, the hotels are crammed, and every day half-a-dozen new sets of jhampannies, carrying a new memsahib, appear on the Mall, and dozens of gallant sahibs come cantering up from the Brewery, with a syce clinging to their ponies' tails, who would believe in that terrible story about Friday, the 18th September, 1880, when, after two days' torrents of rain, during which everyone was a prisoner to the

house, and cut off from their neighbours, there was a hollow rumble—then arose a red, dusty cloud, like fire, and when that cloud had dispersed, and the mist had lifted, the Assembly Rooms, the Victoria Hotel, and several houses had been effaced—swept away and engulfed in a moment, and with them a hundred souls. There are occasional little landslips during the monsoon. Rocks come thundering down, tons of earth crumble off, the cart road “goes” annually, but on the whole Naini-Tal is considered as safe as its neighbours. High up on a hill among rocks and trees, in a somewhat inaccessible spot, you come across a board on which is painted, “Captain Holroyd, Royal Musketeers,” and near it a box for visitors’ cards (which is almost always empty). If you follow the path, you arrive at a dreary-looking, one-storeyed

house, with no view, and the reputation of being very damp, and of having a family of needy panthers among the surrounding rocks. If you penetrated to the drawing-room, the chances are ten to one that you would find Belle cowering over the fire with a shawl on her shoulders and "Mossoo" in her lap, and two to one in a bad temper—both mistress and dog alike victims to ennui. "She was no one up here," she grumbled to Betty every time she saw her. "*She* was a Collector's niece, and asked out to big dinners every night, and taken to picnics up Diopatha and Iopatha, or down to Douglas Dale, but of course that was partly because Mr. Redmond entertained! *She* did not (and so much the better for Naini-Tal). They had got up theatricals—people that knew nothing about them, that could not act one little

bit, and they had never even consulted her, or asked her to take a part. Of course that was all jealousy, and pitifully transparent ! They had heard of her acting at Lucknow, and Mangobad, and seen the account of it in the papers, and were afraid of her cutting them all out. Her reputation had come up before her (it had indeed), and George said it was too soon after her mother's death to go to balls—George was so peculiar,” and so on, in the same strain for about an hour. Belle arrayed her jhampannies in the smartest suits in the station, and excited quite a sensation as she was carried triumphantly along the Mall. But alas ! She had only the clothes now, and no *men* to wear them ; and without jhampannies a lady is comparatively a prisoner. As a class, these sturdy, jovial, brown hill men are most independent ; give them

wood tickets, their mornings to themselves, and no late hours, and no heavy passengers—give them smart suits and caps, and warm blankets, and they will take you out once or—peradventure at a pinch—twice a day, without grumbling. But when a lady, be she ever so light, is always calling for them and harrying them, when she takes them long and steep paths to pay needless visits, and beats them with her parasol, why they figuratively snap their fingers at her and go!—and what is worse, they boycott her in the bazaars. Belle was in a bad plight; she could only join the giddy throng below at the Assembly Rooms, or round the lake, and polo ground, when she could obtain coolies at double fare!

On these days, smartly dressed in what *she* called second mourning, she descended and paraded the Mall with Betty, went

out in a wherry with George, had tea and ices at Morrison's shop and enjoyed herself considerably, forgetting for the time her woes, her hateful servants, and her dismal, murky house.

At the opposite end of the lake, in a good situation, you come upon a fine two-storeyed abode, with Mr. Redmond's name on the gate board and Miss Redmond's box full of cards. He was popular, despite his eccentricities ; everyone knew that if his bark was loud, his bite was nil ; and Betty was much admired as she rode along the Mall and walked on the " Berm " between rows of discriminating British subalterns, sitting on the rails arrayed in boating flannels and gorgeous " blazers." She was in constant request, as Belle had complained, but gave up many a pleasant engagement (to boat, to ride, to play tennis) to climb that weary hill, and to

sit with that querulous, discontented little creature ; who imperatively demanded her visits, and yet when she came, never ceased to scold her sharply for her dress, her friends, and her airs !

The monsoon broke with a violence peculiar to the Himalayas, the rains descended, and the floods came foaming down the mountains, the same mountains and the lake being swallowed up in mist, and all but the most stout-hearted (and booted) were prisoners to the house. Belle was alone. She was laid up with fever, and she wrote such a piteous scrawl, that Betty, in spite of her uncle's angry expostulation, consented to go to her, and cheer her up and stay a week ! She evolved some order in that cheerless home, tidied up the drawing-room, put away Belle's old "chits" and papers, and scraps,

and "Mossoo's" bones, coaxed some servants into the empty godowns, for there was not one on the premises, but a deaf old ayah and a waterman. Belle enjoyed the transformation and the company of a bright companion, and was better, and out, and gay. At the end of the week, George returned from a signalling class at Rankhet, rode in quite unexpectedly, and his arrival was an excuse for Betty's immediate departure, but Belle in vehement language that almost bordered on violent words, insisted that her cousin must remain one day longer, in order to be present at a little dinner party that included Captain La Touche and a neighbouring married couple. Her popular cousin was her social trump card; moreover, she looked to her to make the sweets, and decorate the table.

But when the hour came, although

dressed, Belle felt too ill to appear. She had got her feet wet. She had a cold, and sore throat, and she was forced to stay in her own room by the fire, and dine in company with "Mossoo."

She felt excessively irritable and ill-used, as the sounds of merry laughing and talking came from the adjoining dining-room; *they* were having a very good time, and she—how dull she felt! She had no amusement, not even a book; she rose and searched about for something to read. She went, as a last resource, into George's dressing-room, but there she could find no food for her mind, save sundry Manuals of Infantry Drill and of Field Exercises, and half a dozen red-bound "Royal Warrants." She was turning disconsolately away, when her eyes fell upon his *keys*. Of these he was always so careful—so sus-

piciously careful—and never left them about. Happy thought ! She could amuse herself unusually well, in having a good rummage through his dispatch box. Perhaps she would discover some of his secrets. A husband had no business to have secrets from his wife ; perhaps she would discover something about what she mentally called “the other girl.” With this honourable intention she carried the box into her own room, placed it on a table near the fire, and sat herself deliberately down before it. The key was easily found, and as easily turned in the lock ; the lid was thrown open, and the upper tray scrutinised. Nothing but a cheque book, a banker’s book, some papers and envelopes, and a Manual on Musketry. In the lower compartment were some of his mother’s letters, a packet of paid bills, some recipes for dogs and horses, and at

the bottom of all a sealed parcel. She felt it carefully. Yes—it contained a cabinet photograph—*the* photograph; she must, and would, see what the creature was like.

In a second the cover was torn off. But—but, who was this? holding it to the lamp with a shaking hand.

Betty!

At first, she could not realise the full extent of her discovery, she simply stared, and panted, and trembled. It meant nothing! Then her eye caught sight of the other contents of the packet—a little well-remembered brooch, a withered flower, and a letter in her mother's handwriting.

As she read this, her breast heaved convulsively, the veins in her forehead stood out like cords, her fingers twitched, so that the paper between them rattled and was torn.

When she had come to the very end of it, she sat with her eyes fixed, her hands to her head, as if she had received a galvanic shock. "To think that all along it was Betty, the hypocrite, the viper, the wretch, that robbed me of my husband's love. Oh, how I hate her! How I loathe her! How I wish she was dead! I see it all—all now. She stole him from me that time she went to the Moores, and oh, how false she has been ever since. How well they have kept their secret. I shall never believe in any one again, not in a saint from heaven. And I, poor fool, asking if she *ever* had a love affair! Oh, I could tear her to pieces. I could, I could," and she gnashed her teeth, and clenched her hands, and "Mossoo" fled into hiding under a chest of drawers.

Not a thought of remorse for two

lives sacrificed for her, not a thought of any one but herself, and her wrongs.

Now, she saw why George avoided Betty, at least, in public; now by the light of her discovery she saw everything; many puzzling circumstances were as plain as A, B, C, and here, at this present moment, that abominable girl was under her roof, sitting in *her* place, and entertaining her guests! Oh! Oh! Oh! it was past all endurance, and she began to pace the room almost at a run; her fury rising like a gale at sundown. She must wait (if she could) till those people had gone; it was after eleven; they must leave soon, and *then*——

It was a fearful night. Thunder rolled and crashed among the mountains, the rain came down on the zinc roof with a deafening roar, the paths were foaming water-courses, the water-courses boiling

rivers ; and now and then a furious blast shook the house to its foundation.

At last the laughing and talking ceased, the merry company had departed. She saw their lanterns dimly through the mist, and instantly rushed into the drawing-room. Betty was there, busily putting away cards and counters, and George, who had been speeding his guests, stood in the doorway.

In her furious precipitation, Belle knocked over a chair, and they both turned and saw her—saw her livid, distorted face, compressed lips and glittering eyes—that looked as if they were illuminated by some inward flame—and knew but too well what these signs portended.

“So,” she screamed, her piercing voice distinct above the thundering rain. “So I have found you both out at last ! Oh ! you false wretch,” shaking her own

photograph at Betty, "how I would like to strangle you! You, that we all thought so quiet, so modest, and that was engaged all the time on the sly. You artful, bad girl, you robbed me—*me*—of his affections," pointing to George. "He liked me first, he liked me best. He dares not deny it! I must say this for him, that whatever he is, he is no liar."

All the time she was speaking—screaming, it might be called—she was tearing the photograph into atoms, with feverish, frenzied fingers, and with the word *liar*, she dashed them into Betty's face.

"Belle," said her husband sternly, "what are you about? Have you taken leave of your senses? What do you mean by treating your cousin in this way?"

“There,” she shrieked, “there, you take her part. You try and blind me still! Have I gone out of my senses? No, but I am *going* out of them! I have opened your box, I have read my mother’s letter. I know all. How dared you marry me?”

After this question, there was a pause for ten seconds, the rain and wind alone broke the silence, whilst the raging woman, from whom every restraint had fallen away, awaited his answer.

“I married you,” speaking with painful slowness, “because I thought it was the only thing to be done under the circumstances. I did my best to make you happy, I hoped——”

“Hoped! Thought!” she interrupted, shaking from head to foot. “Who cares what you hoped or thought?” And then she broke into a torrent of passion,

in which scathing, scorching words seemed to pour from her lips one over the other, like a stream of lava. This, to the couple who had been mercilessly sacrificed for her advantage.

“Betty,” said George abruptly, “this is no scene for you ; go to your own room.”

“To her room ! go out of the house, go *now* !” cried Belle, stamping her foot ; “now, this second, do you hear me ?”

“To-morrow,” interrupted her husband, “not to-night, you could not turn a dog out in such weather.”

“No, but I would turn out a snake, a viper, a cobra.”

“You may be certain that Betty is not anxious to trespass on your hospitality, but she will stay as a favour, she shall not go out on such a night, I will not allow it,” he returned firmly.

“Very well then, *I’ll* go ! The Burns will take me in. I refuse to remain under the same roof with that girl for another five minutes.”

“Do not be afraid, Belle, I will go,” said Betty, who had been hitherto too stunned to move or speak. “I will go this moment. You are a cruel woman, you have wronged both George and me, and you will be sorry for all you have said to-morrow.”

Belle’s voice drowned hers in furious protestations to the contrary, and she hastened away, threw on a waterproof, and twisted a scarf round her head, whilst George called for a syce and a lantern.

“Belle,” he said, as he re-entered, putting on his top-coat, and his face looked white and set. “This is about the last straw ! God knows that I have done my best, or tried to do my best

for you. After this we will live apart—apart for ever.”

Before she had time to reply, he was gone, he had quitted the room, and she saw him and Betty go forth into the sheets of rain, and the black surrounding darkness, in the wake of a syce with an oilskin cape over his head, and a lantern in his hand. She watched the trio descend the hill, till they and their flickering light were lost to sight.

Then she went and sat down beside the dying fire—feeling somewhat exhausted—and assured herself that she had done well, had acted as any other wife of spirit would have done, but her fury was abating and her confidence with it; cold remorse began to whisper in her ear, as she listened to the booming of the thunder and the roaring of the rain; they had nearly three miles to go by

the long road, and Betty was in her evening dress and shoes ! Of course George did not care for Betty *now* ; even her distorted mind could not summon the ghost of a charge against him. She glanced over past months, with the piercing eye of a jealous wife. No, there was not a word or a glance, by which she could arraign him.

He had got over it ages ago. Betty would marry some wealthy man, and George was *her* husband. She must forgive them ! At the end of half-an-hour's solitary meditation, during which she had reckoned up her probable allowance and probable prospects at home, she actually had absolved them both. Betty had no business to have had an understanding with George when she was a mere child—and of course did not know her own mind ; but Betty had always been good

to her, forbearing, generous, and useful. Only that very morning she had cooked her a dainty little dish to tempt her appetite, and she had gone down in all the rain to get her a remedy for her cold, and a novel from the library.

And George? yes, he was good to her too; he never refused her money, he never flirted with other women, he always remembered her birthday, he wrote regularly when she was from home, and punctually met her at the station on her return. If he was cold and reserved, and hated French poodles, it was his nature, and he could not help himself. Looking round among the Lords and Masters of her numerous acquaintances, she could not name a woman who had a better husband than her own.

And supposing he had really meant what he said? There was a strange

expression in his eyes,—a look that she had never seen there before, not even after she threw the tennis-bat at Mrs. Monkton ! And once, in a passion, another lady told her that she wondered Mr. Holroyd did not get a divorce for incompatibility of temper ! But no, no ; nothing but death should ever part them. Her Australian trip had shown her one thing most distinctly—that alone, and unprotected by her popular, gentlemanly husband, she was a very helpless and insignificant little person. What was she to do ? Perhaps he would never come back ! The bare idea filled her with dismay. She was now all penitence (as usual). She would follow them instantly to Mr. Redmond's door. She would make it up ; she would abase herself ; she would go by the short cut across the hill, and be there almost as

soon as they were ! No sooner thought than done. She ran into her room, and put on a cloak, and a pair of strong shoes, and going into the back verandah, called imperatively for a lamp and a guide.

But what hill servant, sleeping comfortably in his "comlee," would respond to the screams of a bad memsahib—demanding a light and attendant, at one o'clock, and on such a night ? As she had sowed, she reaped. No answer came, not a sound, not a sign, from the cluster of godowns at the back ; for once she refrained from rousing them in person. She had no time to lose. She was obliged to hunt up a lantern, and to light and carry it herself ; and with "Mossoo" for her sole escort, she set forth in the streaming downpour, and started rapidly up the hill.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH BELLE'S WISH IS FULFILLED.

“Covering with moss the dead's unclosèd eye
The little red-breast teacheth charity.”

BETTY almost ran down the footpath, her feet shod with indignation, and refused her companion's proffered arm with a sharp gesture, that was nearer akin to passion than politeness. At first she hurried along bravely enough, but afterwards more slowly and painfully. What are bronze shoes, and silk stockings, among rocks and broken branches, and overflowing water-courses? One of her feet was badly cut, her hair had been blown adrift by the stormy rain that beat her and buffeted her so mercilessly. At last she

was compelled to cling to the arm she had previously scorned ; for as she stumbled forward in the wake of the blinking lantern and shivering syce, furious gusts of wind came sweeping down between Cheena and Diopatha, and threatened to carry her off her balance, and to extinguish the light. The pair made no attempt to speak, for their voices would have been lost amid the crash of the thunder, and the hollow roar of the torrents, as they tumbled tumultuously down the ravines, and poured into the lake with the noise of an explosion. Amid the unchanging fury of the storm, there were intervals of blinding light, alternating with spells of utter darkness. Once, in a comparatively sheltered spot, Betty halted to twist up her hair. As she did so, a dazzling white flash lit up the dark surrounding hills—the grey sheets of rain pattering

into the lake—the streaming path—their-
selves.

There was a momentary lull, as if the raving, screaming wind was taking breath, and Betty said tremulously, but with perfect distinctness :

“George, to-night it must be *good-bye* between us; you will understand that it cannot be otherwise.”

“Yes,” he returned hoarsely, “I could never ask you to run the risk of such another scene. It must be as you say—God help us !”

A second flash, bright as day, illumined his face ; it was ashen ; and in the haggard eyes so near to hers there was a look of wistfulness and despair—such an agonised look, as the eyes of the dying wear when they take leave of those they love best, and pass away, alone, into that undiscovered country.

In a moment all was black again, and once more the pair resumed that struggle onwards, arm in arm, staggering against the wind, and wrapped in the darkness and the silence of their own thoughts. After half an hour's scrambling and groping, and climbing of slippery paths that ran with water, bruised, drenched, beaten and breathless, they arrived at their destination, and were vociferously announced by the barking of half a dozen curs of high and low degree.

Mr. Redmond always retired late, and was still sitting up ; reading—no—not a treatise on jurisprudence, but a French novel ; he came in his dressing-gown and spectacles, and opened the door in person, and beheld his niece in a soaking evening dress, bareheaded, and almost barefoot ; and Holroyd looking ghastly, with the rain pouring off his cap and moustache.

“What—what does this mean?” he demanded in a voice in which anger and amazement struggled for mastery. “Do you wish to murder the girl—sir—that you bring her out in such a plight on such a night?”

“I am more sorry than I can say, but I could not help it—I——”

“Come in, come in, man alive! and don’t stand dripping there, come in and explain yourself!”

“Uncle Bernard,” said Betty, taking off her cloak and throwing back her wringing hair. “He cannot explain—Belle and I have had a quarrel.”

“A quarrel about what?” turning the lamp full on her colourless face. Dead silence.

“There has been more than a quarrel! There is something in the background. Holroyd, you don’t leave my house till you explain the whole business.”

“Oh, uncle, do not keep him,” expostulated Betty. “Don’t you see how wet he is?”

“Then *you* shall tell me, run away at once, and put on dry clothes. I shall not go to bed till I have come to the bottom of this affair! What will every one say when they hear that your cousin turned you out of doors in the middle of such a night? Holroyd, in common Christian charity I must give you something to drink. I don’t want to have your death on my head, but mind you, I have not done with you. Have some old brandy, neat?”

“No, thank you, I must go,” and he glanced at Betty.

“Yes,” she said, approaching him quickly as she spoke. “You must forgive Belle; she will be very sorry; forgive her as a favour to *me*. Remember,” she

added, almost in a whisper, "what you promised me last Christmas. *Good-bye.*" Her lips trembled, whilst her eyes dismissed him.

"Good-bye," he echoed, in a husky voice, wringing her hand as he spoke. In another second he was gone—gone without a word or glance towards Mr. Redmond, and was hurrying down the hill at breakneck speed.

"Must I tell you, Uncle Bernard?" said Betty, when, after a short interval, she returned to the sitting-room, in a long, white, woollen gown, and with her hair hanging over her shoulders.

"Yes, you must tell me everything, and you must drink this cherry brandy."

"I would so much rather not do one or the other."

"And you will have to do *both*."

"Then, Uncle Bernard, remember you

make me tell what I have never told to a soul," and her eyes flashed at him through tears of passionate pain. "But you stand in the place of my father."

"I do, and you stand to me in the place of a daughter. Begin what you have to say—at once."

"I—I—how can I begin?" she said, shading her face with her hands. "I knew George Holroyd very well three years ago. I was a good deal at Bridgetstown with his mother and sister, and—and—" she hesitated.

"And he made love to you," continued her uncle bluntly.

"He could not marry, for he had no money; he was supporting his mother and sister, and he had but little besides his pay."

"I am surprised he did not ask you to share *that!*" sneered her listener.

“No, no, he would not bind me to any promise, but he said that if his prospects improved—he would write.”

“And he never did. Oh, oh—I see it all !”

“Yes, he wrote and enclosed the letter to Mrs. Redmond, but Mrs. Redmond wanted him to marry her own daughter. She scratched out my name—and gave the letter to Belle.”

“What !” shouted Mr. Redmond, rising to his feet, “what madwoman’s nonsense is this ?”

“It is true : the letter seemed to apply to either of us. Belle thought he liked her—she hated Noone, she was glad to get away from it—at any price,” she gasped, in short and breathless sentences.

“And *you* paid the price ?”

To this question Betty gave no answer

or sign, beyond a slight quivering of the lips.

“Well, go on,” continued the Collector imperiously.

“I never knew the truth, until Mrs. Redmond was dying, and then she told me all. Belle went out to Bombay in complete ignorance, and George met her, and married her.”

“The fool ! the maniac ! the great idiot !” cried Mr. Redmond, throwing up his hands. “He must have been out of his mind.”

“He believed that he was acting for the best,” said Betty with a kind of proud severity, “and I think he did right ; what would have become of Belle, destitute and friendless ? He has always kept his secret till now, but she opened his dispatch box, and read her mother’s letter ; she never had a suspicion of the truth till to-night.”

“And the effect of her discovery?”

“Was to turn me instantly out of her house, but I know she will be sorry to-morrow—she always is.”

“Well—well—well,” turning about and pacing the room, with his hands clasped behind him under his dressing-gown. “I am fifty years of age, and this story—this extraordinary story—transcends everything in my experience either at home or abroad. Poor Holroyd, unfortunate devil! Betty, you will never cross her threshold, and never speak a word to that termagant again.”

“No, nor to him either, uncle; we agreed to-night that we would be strangers for the future.”

“Oh, ha, hum,” stroking his chin; “well I daresay you are right, you can’t cut a woman and know her husband.”

“And now, Uncle Bernard, I am so

very, very tired, you will let me go, won't you?"

She looked haggard and completely exhausted, her face was as white as her gown.

The horror and shame of Belle's outbreak, that terrible walk through rain and darkness, the ordeal of having to lay bare her secret to her uncle, had been too much, even for her fortitude.

"Come and kiss me, Betty. I declare you are a good girl, you are a true Redmond, and have a fine moral backbone. Poor Betty, you have had a hard part to play."

She approached and laid her lips softly on his forehead—lips that were icy cold; she was so grave, and pale, and so utterly unlike herself, that her uncle was slightly awed, and suffered her to depart in silence.

Mr. Redmond still sat up, and actually lit a cigar to soothe his ruffled feelings, and to re-arrange his thoughts.

“That old Redmond woman ought to have been transported. Supposing Betty had got the letter all right, and come out and married Holroyd? Well, he liked him, he used to be a capital fellow, but as it was, Betty could do far better, and marry someone in his own service.”

Poor Holroyd! he had made him his confidante about Hammond too. Yes, that was certainly an awkward mistake. It could not be possible that Betty had still—no—no, out of the question. However, she was a sensible girl, they had better be strangers in future, but he himself was not going to give up George’s acquaintance (man-like, he considered that a woman could easily make sacrifices that were disagreeable and unnecessary for

him). They could still meet and dine at the club ; they could go out shooting together. As to George's wife, to relinquish *her* society was no hardship.

Meanwhile Captain Holroyd was returning homewards with headlong speed ; he had now no girl companion to guide and protect, and as for himself, he did not care. At first he determined to go to an hotel, or the club, for the remainder of the night, but on second thoughts, he changed his mind. He had never been one to send the family linen to the public wash. He would endure to the end—and this was almost the end. It required a man with a more hopeful buoyant nature than his to resist sinking under the weight of his surroundings. He would abandon the struggle once for all. The life he led was not the existence of a self-respecting human being—it was the life of a

dog. He would offer Belle a tempting allowance, leaving himself just sufficient for bare necessities ; he would tell her that he could endure her society no longer, and that she must accept it, and go—go home. If not, if she made a scandal, as she had once threatened, he would sell out, and join some exploring party in Africa, Australia, or Central America. Part they must ; he was past the days of piteous protestations, caresses, and hysterics, and he was about to shape the rest of his life in another form. Belle and her mother had ruined his happiness ; he was an embittered, disheartened, truly miserable man. All his best friends could give him was pity and sympathy. As to what “ might have been,” he dared not trust himself to glance at it. He would free himself from Belle, and put half the world between himself and Betty.

With this stern resolution in his mind, he found himself once more at home—the door stood wide open, the lamp was flaring in the drawing-room, and that apartment was precisely as he had left it—with the overturned chair, and torn photograph, lying on the ground—but empty. Where was Belle? The house seemed unnaturally quiet; he looked into her bedroom, a pair of slippers lay in the middle of the floor, as if they had been hastily kicked off. He called; there was no reply; he searched, he took the lantern and went outside; the rain was abating, for it was near dawn. He held the light close to the ground, and saw the fresh footprints of two small shoes; they went up the hill, not down. In an instant the truth flashed upon him. In a fit of remorse, Belle had followed them and gone by the short cut—the “closed” road.

He seized the lantern, now burning very faintly, and started at once in pursuit ; for more than a mile he followed the pathway, now ascending, now descending, sometimes between rocks, sometimes between trees, sometimes along the bare edge of a sheer naked precipice ; and then the light went out, but as a faint grey glimmer came creeping through the mists, he was able to make his way on at a steady pace, though his heart thumped loudly against his ribs, and his nerves were strung to their utmost tension, for a chill shadow of apprehension seemed to stalk beside him ! Suddenly, turning a sharp corner, he was brought to a standstill, by a ghastly break in the narrow track. The hill above had slipped down five hundred feet, carrying with it, rocks, trees and pathway ; loose showers of little stones were still trickling lakewards, and as the

dawn came stealing over the crest of Cheena, and penetrated through the dispersing clouds, George was aware of a small object, a dog — shivering miserably on the brink of the gaping chasm, or running to and fro, with every token of anguish and despair.

Belle's wish had been accomplished. "Mossoo" survived her.

THE END.

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